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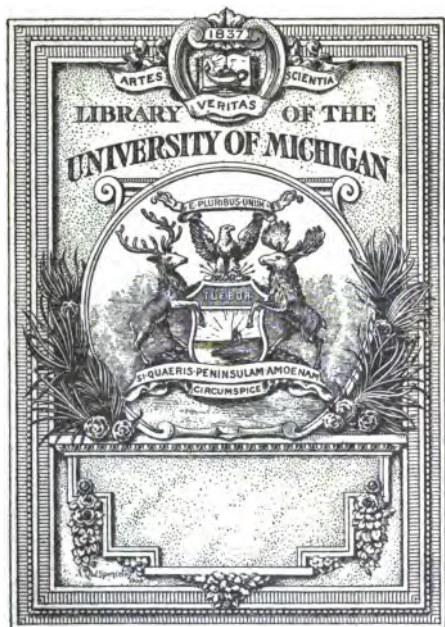
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T FISHER UNWIN

PATERNOSTER SQUARE, LONDON, E.C.

Colloquies of Criticism

OR

Literature and Democratic
Patronage

BY

Unwin, F F.



London

T. Fisher Unwin

Paternoster Square

1901

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Rev. 3-11-37 jms

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I

[*A well-dressed traveller, with a somewhat irritated expression, is attended by a guard and porter at Waterloo Bridge Station.*]

GUARD

Very sorry, Mr Unwin; but I can't find you an empty compartment to-day, sir. On Saturday afternoons this train is always crowded.

PORTER

Only one gentleman here, sir. Every other first is full.

TRAVELLER (*still somewhat irritated*)

This one seems full also—of the other gentleman's things. Well, put my dressing-bag in. Stand it in the middle seat,

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if the gentleman will allow you the liberty of removing his evening paper.

PORTER

Yes, sir—yes, sir. It will ride there nice and easy. Your servant is seeing your fishing rods safe in the guard's van. Thank you, sir, very much—thank you.

TRAVELLER (*as he settles himself*)

And now, what have I done with my two sixpenny novels? Here I am sitting on them. I was always my own worst enemy. Why on earth does the other gentleman put up his glasses and stare at me? I can feel him at it, with the corner of my eye.

THE OTHER GENTLEMAN

Unwin, my dear fellow, I failed to realise that it was you, till I perceived your initials in gold on that magnificent piece of luggage of yours.

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MR UNWIN (*Clerk in the House of Lords*)

Ah, Sir John, how are you? You may well smile at my bag. My old one was worn out, and I've just had to buy this. It's so indecently new, it makes me feel I must be on my honeymoon. In reality I'm going into Hampshire, to fish for a day or two, at my brother's. The last time I saw you was at a meeting of the Statistical Society. I need hardly say I listened to you with great interest.

THE RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN PRICHARD
(*Banker, Littérateur and M.P.*)

I fear you will think I do nothing but deliver addresses to societies. I have one to deliver to-morrow, at the opening of a literary institute; and, indeed, when you entered I was thinking over what I should say.

MR UNWIN (*looking out of the window*)

I hope, then, that nobody will come

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pushing into our carriage to disturb you. Look, what a crowd! Portly fathers of families; young ladies with elegant waists; brothers, cousins, and admirers; frock coats, flannels, and bicycles. How smart they all are! There seems to be no end of them.

SIR JOHN

My experience at the Inland Revenue Office has taught me many curious things. Certain people are astonished at the multitude of our very poor. What astonishes me is the multitude of our well-to-do. Some of our new wealth makes a few new millionaires. Far more of it goes to the creation of a crowd like that. Well, we are off at last. None of your friends have intruded on us.

MR UNWIN

I see, Sir John, you are well provided with books, though they hardly

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seem books that would aid you in composing a serious lecture. Do you mean to say you're so extravagant every time you travel as to buy five novels at six shillings apiece? I never buy one that costs me more than sixpence.

SIR JOHN

I am more frugal still. I never buy one at all. These are from Mudie's. The fact of the matter is, the subject of my address is to be fiction: so I asked for the five novels that have sold best during the year, and I must say the librarian has treated me very handsomely, for of one of these the sale has been sixty thousand, and of none of the others does it seem to have been less than forty thousand.

MR UNWIN

Who, I wonder, are the people

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by whom these books are bought? For the libraries cannot possibly absorb more than half of them. I can't afford to buy them; and people like you don't buy them. Go to a country house, where there is everything that money can provide. The chairs, the plate, and the linen belong, I suppose, to the premises. The novels are invariably hired in by the week. Who are the thousands and thousands with whom sums of six shillings are so plentiful that they throw them away on trash which no one will read twice, and which you and I could, with difficulty, read once?

SIR JOHN

You saw them on the platform at Waterloo. Will you do me one little favour? Look out of the window for a minute or two, while I make a calculation in my pocket-book. I'll tell you why I asked you to do so

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the moment my sums are finished. Where are the figures I want? Ah, here. Let me see. Thirty - five thousand one hundred and seventy, two forty. Yes—yes—in all, getting on for half a million. Thank you. I've done my business. Well—and what have you seen?

MR UNWIN

I have just seen two extraordinarily pretty young ladies playing at tennis on a lawn close to the railway, and another one looking at them from a verandah covered with creepers.

SIR JOHN

If you've seen one such lawn and verandah, you've seen at least a hundred. Look at that road with gardens on each side of it, and villa after villa with its red roofs and chimneys. Look at that hill; it is covered with them. Well, I know

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what I say, for I've sat for a suburban constituency ; and the smallest of these villas, with its little verandah and tennis-lawn, means a family with nearly four hundred a year. Those bigger ones on the hill—the people who live in them have anything from five hundred a year up to two thousand. There the crowds which you saw at the station live. There go your six-shilling novels ; and here, if I'm not boring you, are my own little calculations.

MR UNWIN

Well, Sir John, let us have them.

SIR JOHN

One other word first. When you, and people like you, think of the world of novel-readers, your thoughts are limited, I don't say to the fashionable world, but to the fashionable world and its relations, who are not rich enough to be fashionable. Many of these,

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they connected with the richest, have—well, how shall we put it? You and I, for example, have relations and friends whose incomes are considerably under two thousand pounds a year.

MR UNWIN

I can answer for it that my own is.

SIR JOHN

Now, then, let me ask you to consider this. The world—your world—that we are speaking of—it is prominent, and in many ways influential. Newspapers exist in order to record the doings of one-third of it. But did you ever think how small it is in point of numbers? If you allow to each family an average of five members, it is a world that is accommodated in ten or twelve thousand houses; and many of these, as you and I know, are considerably worse than those we were just looking at on the hill. Well, here are the little sums I

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have worked out for your benefit. Of families who occupy houses better than those on the hill, there are in this country very nearly forty thousand. Of families who occupy houses quite as good, with their gardens, their gables, their conservatories, and their twisted chimney stalks, there are in this country at least 170,000. What is the section of society which you and I call ours, as buyers of books, compared with a population like this? And, bear with me a moment longer—I have still another sum to show you. Those little villas, not on the hill, but by the railway, with their verandahs and their tennis-grounds, where you saw the young ladies playing—my dear Unwin, I could tell their ratable value at a glance, and the average income of the sort of people that live in them. None less, as I said, than three hundred and fifty; most of them nearer five hundred. People like these, I grant you, are not

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buyers of novels, but they all get them from the libraries ; and when a novel is exceptionally popular, a very large part of its sale is attributable to their demand ; for of the pretty little villas in which novel-readers of this class live, the number in this country is over two hundred and forty thousand.

MR UNWIN

Roughly speaking, then—let me do a sum now—the upper fifty thousand, if one may call them so, are, as related to the novel-reading public as a whole, in a proportion of not more than one to forty-four.

SIR JOHN

Wait, for I have not quite done. You know Williams, your brother's bailiff, and his pretty, fair-haired daughter ?

MR UNWIN

You mean Miss Flossie, the smartest

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young lady in church, with her furs, her white gloves, her Prayer-book mounted in silver, and her secret home in the heart of every successive curate.

SIR JOHN

Precisely. Now, Williams has an income of some two hundred and fifty pounds. He himself is content with the *Live Stock Journal*; but Miss Flossie reads novels far more industriously than you do. Well, of households like that of Williams, though few have so pretty a daughter, there are in this country more than six hundred thousand; so we must add them to the public by which the fate of novels is decided; and you'll see that your own world forms hardly a hundredth part of it. Did you ever realise that?

MR UNWIN

I don't know that I did—not in any definite way; but still, if one comes to

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think of it, one sees that it must have always been so.

SIR JOHN

My dear Unwin, there you are wrong. One does not see that this has always been so, and for the very simple reason that it has not always been so. That it is so now is something entirely new. It is something that has come to pass since I was at Christ Church and you were in long clothes. More than two-thirds of this enormous well-to-do public is actually the creation of the past thirty-five years. It is a public which has grown during that period more than six times as fast as the population. Your eyes, if you use them, can tell you this. Go to any town in the kingdom, and what will strike you first? The crop of new villas which are springing up on its outskirts; and if you want to see the effects which the rise of this new public is producing, you

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can study more than one of them in the popular fiction of to-day.

MR UNWIN

I hope, Sir John, you'll work that out in your lecture. If you will, I promise to come and hear you. My first question, however, remains unanswered still. I am astonished not so much at the number of people who read novels, as at the number of people who buy them, and think it worth while to do so. You talk of the countless families who have fifteen hundred a year. I, being a bachelor, am practically richer than they; but I can't buy novels at six shillings apiece.

SIR JOHN

But you buy other things, which those families don't. They don't, like you, spend fifty pounds on a dressing-bag. They don't, as you do, whenever you dine at a club, spend the price of a

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novel on a pint of dry champagne. You travel with a servant; they don't. But there's another answer to your question which is more to the point still. This public we speak of takes its novels far more seriously than you do. It will spend more money on them than you will, because it values them more than you do—more than you do or any of the people you live among.

MR UNWIN

In that case we may flatter ourselves we are better judges than they are.

SIR JOHN

Perhaps — within limits — perhaps. But it is not mere literary judgment that lies at the root of the matter. They value novels more than you and your friends, mainly because novels do for them something which you and your friends are able to do for yourselves.

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MR UNWIN

What do you mean? Why, we're stopping! What station is this? And see!—that grim-looking gentleman, with blue spectacles, and a wife—I do believe it, they have an eye on our carriage. Yes! here they come. This is an end to our conversation. I shall trust to your lecture for having my question answered.

SIR JOHN

If I can't answer it in my lecture, I will do so when next we meet. Depend upon it, the criticism of works of fiction leads us to many truths which are not merely literary.

II

[*Drawing-room in Sir George Unwin's house in Hampshire.*] MR UNWIN (*younger brother of Sir George*), SIR JOHN PRICHARD, M.P. and F.R.S.

MR UNWIN

Well, Sir John, we read your address on contemporary fiction in the paper, though we none of us were able to come and hear you ourselves. You did not answer the question which you suggested when we talked in the train ; but, as you can stay over Sunday, you can enlighten us about it in private.

SIR JOHN

Let me see now, what question was that ?

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MR UNWIN

You said, you remember, that the character of popular fiction has been greatly changed by the growth of the reading public, by the development, so you said, during the past thirty years of an enormous middle class, which is a new social feature.

SIR JOHN

Yes, yes; I remember that perfectly. The middle class has grown during the period you speak of six times as fast as the population, and its growth is affecting fiction, because it is the chief patron of fiction.

MR UNWIN

You said also—it was your parting critical shot—that this class furnishes the majority of the buyers of novels; and you said that it buys these books, pays six shillings apiece for them, while the fashionable world only hires them

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from libraries, because novels for it do something or other — you didn't say what—which they don't do for the fashionable world.

SIR JOHN

Precisely, precisely; and what I meant was this. It's an excellent illustration of another thing which I said to you, that the criticism of fiction opens out many questions very much wider than any that are merely literary.

MR UNWIN

Wait a moment. Here, I see, is my sister. Let her come and listen too. You will find her a most eager disciple.

MISS UNWIN (*coming forward*)

Please, Sir John, don't get up. Go on with your homily. I'll say 'How do you do?' to you when it's finished. You were so very gallant at the ball

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where I last saw you, that your farewell
there will do for a welcome here.

SIR JOHN

I said good-bye to a young lady who
was the spirit of a London ballroom.
I want to say 'How do you do?' to
one who is the spirit of new-mown
grass.

MISS UNWIN

Say all that afterwards. Don't
dawdle any longer now.

SIR JOHN

Well, my dear Miss Adeline, I was
just now observing to your brother—

MISS UNWIN

You needn't—what's the word?—you
needn't recapitulate. Why does this
great public take novels more seriously
than we do? Or what do novels do for

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it, et cetera—? You see I have grasped the point.

SIR JOHN

Well, if you will have it so, instead of admiring you, let me lecture you—for the time being, that is. Attend then, for I'm going to begin. Smart young ladies like you see no further than your own visiting lists. *Mutatis mutandis*, I was saying the same thing to your brother. But outside the people you know are these countless people you don't know. There I have the advantage of you, for I have known and know a great many of them; and I should say that in a great many ways, though not in all, there is more intellectual activity outside your world than in it. But your world has one advantage. It's the only world of its kind. At every house at which you visit, from Caithness to Land's End, from Suffolk to Connemara, you meet people

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who, if they are not actually your friends, are friends, acquaintances, connections, or relations of your friends. If you go abroad—if you go to Rome or to St Petersburg—you probably have some access to a world of a similar kind. Thus, wherever you are, you are practically living at a meeting-place of all the news, the fashions, the arts and the refinements of life which have developed themselves, and are developing themselves, throughout Europe and America.

MISS UNWIN

I never perhaps realised the full extent of my blessedness before. With your valuable help, I am able to grasp it now. But, as Miss Kenwigs says in *Nicholas Nickleby*, 'I'm not proud, because ma says it's sinful.'

SIR JOHN

Don't be too quick with your com-

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prehension. That's like riding over the hounds. To resume, then, I say that while your world is the only world of its kind, the rest of our opulent or well-to-do fellow-citizens—many of whom, Miss Adeline, dress nearly as well as you do—comprise not one world, but fifty, a hundred, two hundred different worlds. Their circumstances are similar, but they don't know each other. They are drawn together into no common focus. Your own friends in Caithness, as I said just now, know your own friends in Cornwall; but the society of Belfast has no similar knowledge of the society of Norwood. The society of Taunton knows nothing of the society of Dundee.

MISS UNWIN

May I now, without indiscretion, venture to say that I understand you?

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SIR JOHN

No, miss, you may not ; for I venture to say you don't. But you may in a minute, for in a minute more I shall have explained myself. What I want to tell you is this—that the sort of unity of vision, the sort of comprehensive grasp, the sort of bird's-eye view of life, which you, and people like you, get by the mere act of living, these similar yet separate societies of fairly opulent people—some, indeed, are very opulent—get by means of literature : and by literature, this afternoon, understand that I mean novels.

MR UNWIN

I see your point, but I should like to ask you a question or two.

SIR JOHN

Does the young lady see it ?

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MISS UNWIN

Yes, the young lady does. She also sees the tea-things; and while she's seeing the point better, she'll give you a cup of tea. Stay where you are; and I'm not going to give you sugar, because I know you always carry about with you a little bottle of saccharine.

SIR JOHN

I'm proud to see that beauty condescends to wait upon age.

MISS UNWIN

Not at all. It is youth that aspires to wait upon wisdom. When I was a girl, Sir John, before I was out of the schoolroom, I looked upon novels myself in just the way you describe. They seemed to give me just that unity of vision you speak of, that bird's-eye view of life; or at least I thought they did. I laugh now when I think of what nonsense I took seriously.

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MR UNWIN

While Sir John is defenceless, and busy with that segment of tea-cake, I am going to attack him with the questions of which I have just given him notice. You remember those novels you had the other day in the train with you—the five novels that had sold best during the year. Well, two of them were stories of peasant life in Scotland. One was a story of adventure among ruffians and buccaneers, who betted their ‘bottom dollars,’ and I’ve no doubt spat continually. Another was a sort of idyl, full of half-religious sentimentality, the scene of which was some American village. Only one of them dealt with polite life in England; and anything less like the original it is hardly possible to imagine.

MISS UNWIN

Yes, Sir John; why is it, whenever the ordinary novelist tries to describe

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what my brother calls polite life, that he makes his characters talk some extraordinary jargon utterly unlike anything that was ever spoken by anybody?

SIR JOHN

Not so fast, young lady, not so fast. I know exactly what your brother is going to say. He is going to ask how novels of peasant life in Scotland, of life in an American village, or of adventure among expectorating ruffians, can give, in a social sense, any unity of vision to the countless separate societies of well-to-do people in England.

MR UNWIN

Yes. That's what I mean. You say that the middle class gets a unity of vision through novels which the upper class gets through the accident of its own position. But not only do

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very few of the novels which deal with the upper class give any accurate picture of it, but the number of novels that attempt to deal with it at all seem to me to be relatively very much fewer than they were.

SIR JOHN

I didn't mean that the mass of the well-to-do English public get, by means of novels, the unity of vision we speak of, because novels give them an experience of fashionable life vicariously. If this is true at all, it's only a bit of the truth. For the present, let us put the fashionable novel aside. It's an amusing subject. We'll talk of it at some other time. We'll put aside, also, the novels of pure adventure. People read them not to extract knowledge of life from them, but rather for the sake of forgetting it. Let us think only of the novels of peasant and village life. Well, village life, whether in the Scottish

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lowlands or in America, is a very different thing from the life of the trim villa. Why, then, is the villa so interested in reading about the village? That's your point, so I take it.

MR UNWIN

Yes. Why is it? How does reading about the village give the villa unity of vision?

SIR JOHN

If you want to realise where you are in a country, you calculate how far you are from a number of distant points. In the same way pictures of village life—that is to say, of life in its simplest forms—supply all the countless societies of well-to-do people in the kingdom with a common point from which they can measure their own distance.

MISS UNWIN

You mean to say that the villa

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likes to read about the village, because doing so gives it a sense of its own gentility.

SIR JOHN

Any truth, by a clever young lady like yourself, can be easily caricatured into an absurdity. It is not only to a sense of its own gentility that a reading of books like these appeals in the middle class. It appeals also to a widespread sense of sympathy; but it certainly does appeal to a sense of social difference, and it makes this conscious of itself. There is no harm in this sense; there is nothing at which you need laugh. It is closely associated with a corporate sense of responsibility. However, my point is this, that whatever sense they appeal to, pictures of the life of the village assist the villa in a process of self-orientation. Does Miss Adeline understand that?

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MISS UNWIN

Orientation is a word of five syllables, but in spite of its length Miss Adeline actually understands it.

SIR JOHN

Well—even if she does, I am going to dot my i's. I am going to show her that this sense of distance in the reader from the things and the life described, which these novels of humble life produce in the well-to-do, is essentially, for the readers, a part of the charm of the description. I can make this clear in a word or two. In novels such as those which deal with peasant life in Scotland—I believe the newspapers call them 'novels of the kail-yard school'—the narrative is written in correct, indeed, in good English, but the characters speak in the broadest provincial Scotch.

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MISS UNWIN

They do; and to me that's what makes them so tiresome.

SIR JOHN

From our present point of view it makes them very instructive; for just consider this. When the authors of these books write their narrative in good English, the assumption is that they are addressing their readers in the kind of language which the readers themselves speak. Such being the case, it is assumed also that the dialect in which the characters speak is a dialect distinct from that used by the readers; and this assumption implies the farther assumption that the readers of these books occupy a rank of life which is distinct from, and superior to, the rank occupied by the characters. There's no getting over that fact; and you'll find that

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a great deal hangs on it. But I see your eldest brother, my excellent host Sir George, go by the window with eight dogs at his heels. He will want to talk to me, not about literary criticism, but about the proposed extension of our Urban Sanitary District.

MISS UNWIN

Well, turn down the page at the place where you've left off; and we'll celebrate Sunday by sitting at your feet again.

MR UNWIN

Do you know why my sister takes such an interest in what you are saying?

SIR JOHN

I hope because she thinks I'm an exceedingly wise man.

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MR UNWIN

No. It's because she is an exceedingly foolish young woman; and she's made a bid for immortality by writing a novel herself.

III

*[A lawn, with seats, at Sir George Unwin's house
in Hampshire.]* SIR JOHN PRICHARD, M.P.,
F.R.S., MR UNWIN and MISS UNWIN.

SIR JOHN

Here we are, once again in conclave ;
and now I hope to hear more about the
great secret. Miss Unwin has written
a novel, but that's all you have confided
to me. If she only would trust me with
the manuscript, I might be able to find
her a publisher.

MR UNWIN

Ah, Sir John, I'm sorry ; but you've
missed your opportunity. The novel is
out, and five thousand copies have been
sold of it.

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SIR JOHN

My dear Miss Adeline, I congratulate you. And what is the name of the masterpiece? And what is the name under which the authoress hides herself?

MISS UNWIN

That, if you care to hear it, I'll tell you by-and-by; but first I want to hear some more of your own wisdom. You were saying yesterday, when my eldest brother interrupted us, that the new middle class is now the arbiter of the fate of novels; and that to its taste has been due the extraordinary popularity of novels whose characters are peasants talking the broadest Scotch. You also said that such readers like fiction of this kind because it implicitly addresses them as superior persons, who are invited to contemplate an existence which is socially below their own.

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SIR JOHN

I said that was one of the reasons. I said that every novel in which the narrative is written in the language of the highly-educated, while the characters speak in some different and provincial dialect, does imply that the readers to whom it is addressed are persons in a position superior to that which the characters occupy, and invites them to judge the characters by a set of standards different from, and in a certain sense superior to, the standards of the characters themselves. The same thing is true of all the works of Dickens. You don't suppose that Miss Squeers or Betsy Prig would be as amusing to themselves as they are to us when we read about them. They neither of them, so far as I remember, utter a single word which, among people of their own class, would even excite a smile.

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MISS UNWIN

That is true, certainly. I never had thought of that ; though now, since you wake my conscience, I shall confess to you, when the time comes, that I had thought, or rather assumed, something very much like it.

SIR JOHN

Miss Adeline, do you draw or paint ? Is that among your many accomplishments ?

MISS UNWIN

I sometimes smudge in something which I try to flatter myself is a landscape.

SIR JOHN

Of course you know, then, that every picture that's painted must necessarily be painted from some particular point of view ; and if you shift your point of

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view by even a few yards, each object in your picture will present a different aspect.

MISS UNWIN

Yes. If our rooms were painted by Liliputians, our tables would have the appearance of temples or great pavilions ; and the under side of them, at which we never look, would be the ceilings.

SIR JOHN

Well, just the same observation applies to the writing of novels. The novelist, like the painter, must draw from some point of view. He may not know that this is so ; but it is, and he can't help himself. But about the novelist there is something more to be said. His business is, in one respect, far more complicated than painting ; for while the painter draws from one point of view only, the novelist draws from several.

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MISS UNWIN

Why, you said just now that he drew only from one.

SIR JOHN

What I meant was that he drew from only one of its kind. What I want to say now is that of the points of view which he draws from, although he can draw from only one of its kind, he must draw from several kinds at one and the same time. Thus the 'kailyard' novelists, as I said, draw the life of the kailyard from the platform occupied by refined and educated men. Then, again, in the lives and actions of their characters, they assume that certain elements will excite the reader's sympathy—that they will be regarded by him as interesting on account of their charm or virtue. There you have the moral point of view. Then, again, the drama of human life is looked upon

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by some novelists as interesting on account of its incidents. Gaboriau and Dr Conan Doyle are novelists of this class. It is only for the sake of incident that they set any value on character. On the other hand, you have novelists like Thackeray, with whom the case is reversed. It is only as throwing light upon character that they set any value on incident. Here we have what we may call the point of view of the narrator.

MR UNWIN

This is a kind of criticism which appeals strongly to me, because it treats the novelist as a man, not as a mere writer.

SIR JOHN

I daresay you will think that I am, in saying all this, getting somewhat away from the subject on which we started—I mean the influence on novels

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of the enormous new middle class ; but I'm not. I am keeping close to it. What I want to impress on you is that the immediate popularity of a novel, under existing conditions, depends mainly on one of the points of view which the writer occupies in writing it ; and this point, if I may invent a new critical phrase, is the point of social sympathy. Since, then, our enormous middle class now furnishes us with the majority of the buyers and readers of novels, those novels will be most popular — other things being equal—in which the point of social sympathy is that of the class in question.

MISS UNWIN

I suppose you would say, Sir John, then, that all the ridiculous novels about fashionable life by people who know nothing about it are read by the class you speak of, not because they give a true picture of what fashionable life is,

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but of what a certain class of readers think it is?

SIR JOHN

Many of these novels which to us are intolerably false and vulgar, are false and vulgar, not because they describe what does not exist, but because they emphasise as essentials and peculiarities habits and things which to us are mere natural accessories. One of the vulgarest fashionable novels I ever read in my life—one that to any of us would give the falsest impression of the life it was intended to describe—was written by my dear old friend Lady Hester Markland ; and all the scenes and characters were taken from her own family. I remember she spoke of her father as ‘the old marquis, who was living in his proud castle, in lofty and luxurious calm’ ; and she talked about his plate and his servants as if she wondered they were there ; whereas in real life she

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would have been very much surprised if they hadn't been. The explanation of the matter was that she was a very charitable person, who had a club for milliners' apprentices, at which she often read to them. Accordingly, in writing her fashionable novel she instinctively fancied herself to be writing it for her most frequent audience, and the consequence was that in writing for milliners' apprentices she wrote exactly as if she had been a milliner's apprentice herself. This shows you how an author is influenced by the public for which he or she writes.

MISS UNWIN

My feeling is that to write a good novel one should fancy oneself addressing people of one's own class, let that class be what it may. One should write as one would speak if one were among one's personal friends, who shared one's habits and tastes, and one's way of

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looking at things and people ; and one should leave the result to take care of itself.

MR UNWIN

I myself, other things being equal, prefer a novel that deals with ladies and gentlemen. But do you think it necessary that all works of fiction should be written from a point of sympathy distinctive of some one class? Great plays need not be written so. In the *Antigone* of Sophocles, in *Hamlet* or in Goethe's *Faust*, the point of sympathy is one which is common to all classes. So it is in *Don Quixote*; so it is in *Ivanhoe*.

SIR JOHN

I admit that what you say is true of poetic dramas ; but you must please to remember I am talking only of novels, and I am talking in particular of novels of contemporary life. In poetic dramas,

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or in novels of a distant time, like *Ivanhoe*, the characters are universalised by a certain conventional treatment, and social sympathy disappears in moral and human sympathy. But in novels of contemporary life, this is the case but rarely. I'll tell you why. If such novels are to produce any illusion at all, they must have some close correspondence with the actual manners of the day. Now each class has manners—and in manners I include all the details of living—which are more or less peculiar to itself, which form for it a natural standard of behaviour, social or mental, and any deviation from which it feels to be abnormal or ridiculous. A novelist, therefore, who deals with contemporary life must endow all his characters with one sort of manners or another; and the manners of those characters, in whom the interest of his story centres, or in many cases his own manners in describing them, imply the

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adoption by him of a particular social standard. In the 'kailyard' novels we talked about, it is implied in the manners of the author—in his own correct language or contrasted with the provincialism of his characters. In the novels of Miss Burney and Miss Austen it is implied both in the manners of the authoresses and in the manners of the characters for whom they claim our sympathy. In the novel of contemporary life, this specialising of the point of social sympathy imposes a limitation on the scope of the writer's art, from which it is always very hard, and generally impossible, for him to escape.

MISS UNWIN

But do you think it would be a good thing that he should escape from it? Half the fun of Miss Austen, and all the fun of Miss Burney—for I think I understand you now—would quite

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disappear without it. So would that of Dickens, as you yourself said. So would that—for I'll add an instance of my own—of many of the best scenes of George Eliot. Think of Mrs Poyser; think of Aunt Gleg and Mr Tulliver.

SIR JOHN

I'm not now saying whether I think the limitation bad or good. Many of the most delightful effects of the novelist's art are due to it. But it limits the art, all the same, and it limits the public to which the art appeals; or, if you like the phrase better, it specialises the public. I will also add, if you wish for my real opinion, that there are conditions under which this limitation may be eluded; and when it is eluded the novel gains something in consequence.

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MISS UNWIN

And what conditions are those?

SIR JOHN

A novel of contemporary life may escape from the limitation we speak of, when it is a tragedy—when it deals with the great elementary passions; or when it is an idyl. It may escape from them also when—

MISS UNWIN

Yes, Sir John—when?—when?—

SIR JOHN

That, now I come to think of it, would be rather a long story. I'll tell you that when you've told me the name of your own novel.

MISS UNWIN

I will whisper it in your ear. I

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am shy of the sound of my child's
name.

SIR JOHN -

God bless my soul! You don't mean
to say that's yours! You should be
lecturing me, not I you.

IV

[SIR JOHN PRICHARD, M.P., F.R.S., and Miss
UNWIN *in the garden, walking.*]

SIR JOHN

Now that we're by ourselves, I can go back to the subject. Since our talk this morning, I've been reading your novel again. I don't want to flatter you, but you've something of Miss Austen's touch, with a little more malice than she had, and much more worldly experience. But if it's your ambition to be widely popular, I'm afraid it's your very merits that will stand most in your way.

MISS UNWIN

I'm most becomingly humble, and very willing to be instructed.

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SIR JOHN

Happily or unhappily you are, my dear Miss Adeline, gifted with a keen sense of social absurdity. But the absurdities that amuse you are very subtle things, and are sure to be absurdities only when looked at from a particular position, which is occupied only by a limited number of people.

MISS UNWIN

You said the same thing about Dickens. You said that Miss Squeers would not have been absurd to herself—that she is absurd only to people more refined and better educated than she.

SIR JOHN

Yes; but for every ten thousand people who can see the absurdities which amuse you, there are at least several hundred thousand people who

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can see the absurdity of such characters as Miss Fanny Squeers. But that's not the whole of the matter. Of these several hundred thousand people there are a great many who amuse Miss Adeline Unwin in just the same way that Miss Squeers amuses them; and if Miss Adeline Unwin expresses her amusement at them in a novel she can hardly expect that those who excite her amusement will share in it.

MISS UNWIN

I'm not so sure about that. Some of the absurdest people I know are some of my own relations.

SIR JOHN

I will not presume to contradict you; but if they are, they are absurd, not because of their manners, but because of their characters. That's a very different thing.

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MISS UNWIN

I see my brother coming across the lawn. Let us wait for him, and he shall join our discussion.

SIR JOHN

Your brother, in one respect, is just like you. Nothing divides him from other people more completely than a difference in manners between himself and them. When he comes, I'll give you an example of what I was just saying—not from your book, but from the book of another person.

MR UNWIN

You're at it again, then, are you? I could see you were by your attitudes; and I can see also by the way in which Adeline is pouting that she doesn't agree with something Sir John's been telling her. I hope, Sir John, you haven't been cutting her book up.

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SIR JOHN

We have got off her book—her admirable book—she has no more admiring or amused reader than myself—and here we are back again on general principles. I suppose, my dear Unwin, you are acquainted with the novels of Miss Broughton.

MR UNWIN

If only her style were a little bit more classical, I should look on her as one of the most delightful humourists of the day.

SIR JOHN

I agree with you, so far as my own taste goes. You remember then—I'm quite sure Miss Adeline remembers—a description in one of her books of life in a small villa, outside some garrison town; and of one of the young ladies who, walking with

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some admiring lieutenant, thinks it a piece of engaging coquettishness to change hats with him.

MR UNWIN

Yes; and do you remember the same lieutenant, who, without having rung the bell, announces himself in the young ladies' drawing-room at tea-time by saying, facetiously, as he puts in his head at the door, 'Any admittance, except on business'? I don't often laugh out loud to myself, but I did when I read those chapters.

SIR JOHN

But do either of you reflect that there are in this country an enormous mass of novel readers who wouldn't laugh at them at all—people who are precisely like the lieutenant and the young ladies in question? They would be annoyed to think they were being laughed at, and would be unable to

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understand why. They don't read Miss Broughton; and they won't read your sister. Now, I don't blame Miss Broughton for this limitation in her art, nor do I blame Miss Adeline either, any more than I blame Dickens, who was limited in the same way, only not so narrowly. Indeed, I think a narrowing of these limitations, which takes place in proportion to the fastidiousness of the social sympathies of the writer, has a tendency to make a novel a more perfect work of art; and that a widening of these limitations, which takes place in proportion to the writer's want of fastidiousness, has a tendency to make a novel less perfect. For this reason, as I will explain to you presently, I think that the influence of a heterogeneous middle class, which demands that its novels shall be written from its own point of social sympathy, has on novels, as literature, a very

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deteriorating effect. 'But— There is always a 'but'; and it will seem to you that in this case, my own 'but' is a paradox.

MR UNWIN

Let us hear it, and we will judge.

SIR JOHN

If we could get rid of these limitations of social sympathy altogether—if we could, as we do in poetry, merge social sympathy in human sympathy, novels of every class would be improved by this kind of enfranchisement.

MR UNWIN

That's precisely what I was saying to you myself when we last discussed the subject.

SIR JOHN

I know—I know. I'm quite well

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aware of that. But you seem to think that this enfranchisement was easier than it really is. In ordinary life, manners are the medium through which all character shows itself. Now, the manners of each class are to it the natural dialect of life ; and if a novelist, dealing with the life of the present day, wants his readers to hear his characters talk, to see their forms and faces, and to be a real spectator of their actions, it is very difficult for him to accomplish this result without investing them with manners which shall specialise them as members of a class, and distinguish them in a marked way from members of other classes.

MISS UNWIN

Here we come back to the point where we left off this morning. You said it was difficult to do this, but not impossible. You said it was possible to do this in novels which were

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tragedies, and also in novels which were idyls; but you did not tell us how or why.

SIR JOHN

To explain that, which is not very difficult, I must ask you to remember that I said that all novels, whilst they are written from only one point of view of its kind, are written from points of view of several different kinds. One of them, I said, is the point of view of interest. Is the kind of interest to which the novelist appeals an interest in character, or in incident? Or, again, is it an interest in incidents, vicissitudes and perplexities of an ordinary kind, or an interest in deep moral feelings and the great primary passions? Now suppose that the novelist appeals to our interest in the great primary passions. The moment he does this, the question of manners becomes a merely secondary question,

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and for the same reasons that it does so in actual life. Under the deepest emotions people of all classes speak far more alike than they do on ordinary occasions; and even if their manners are not precisely the same, the differences become unimportant. They are accidents; they mean nothing. When a husband and wife are discussing their daughter's marriage, it is difficult to forget the class of society to which they belong. Every feeling they utter will probably have some reference to it. But when a man is bending over the bed of a wife or son who is dying, all that is essential in his feelings or in his language might as well belong to a man of one class as another. The social point of sympathy is nothing; the human point of sympathy is everything.

MR UNWIN

I remember—though I doubt if I can quote it quite correctly—a passage in

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one of George Eliot's earlier stories, in which an old cottage woman tells her friends and children to look at her dead husband before the coffin-lid is nailed down. 'The hours,' she says, 'for viewing the body are passing like melting snow.' I forget all the rest of the story. I never can forget that.

SIR JOHN

You remember what Wordsworth says. He says the language of men and women under strong emotions naturally becomes poetry. My point is that a novel which has for its centre of interest the deepest, the greatest, the most overwhelming emotions of human nature, tends to resemble poetry, in having a similarly universal character. The *dramatis personæ* may belong to any class ; but the reader will hardly notice their class. He will think of them as human beings.

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MISS UNWIN

I understand that. Tell us now what you meant about idyls. I am not quite certain myself what an idyl is; except that one fancies vaguely that 'idyllic' is the same as 'simple.'

SIR JOHN

The word 'idyl,' no doubt, is used rather loosely; but the general idea connected with it is some story, necessarily short and simple, which deals with typical feelings isolated from all specialising circumstances. Poets have given us this in idyls of shepherds and shepherdesses, and they have attributed to their characters this primitive station in life in order that their circumstances might be universalised by being represented in terms of symbolism. The prose idyl of modern life cannot isolate its characters from circumstances by precisely the same means; but it deals

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with some crisis in the lives of some few, or perhaps of two people, which might take place just as well in one class of life as in another. Such being the case, the social circumstances of the characters, even if they are specialised, as they must be, by certain touches of realism, have no literal significance. They become almost as symbolical as the circumstances of the shepherds and shepherdesses. An idyl, in fact, is in some ways the counterpart of the tragedy; only while tragedy gains universality by dealing with the deepest emotions of human nature, the idyl gains it dealing with the gentlest.

MISS UNWIN

I suppose you would call some of Miss Thackeray's stories idyls?

SIR JOHN

Yes—some of them: and *Paul et Virginie* and *Werther*, and parts of

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The Vicar of Wakefield—but certainly not *Cranford*. The whole of that book is saturated with implied social comparisons. But the scope of the idyl is necessarily small.

MR UNWIN

Yes ; and so is the scope of tragedy. Tragedy, we may be thankful to say, embraces only exceptional and occasional parts of life. If the novel, therefore, can escape from the limitations about which we have been talking only through the dark portals of the dolorous city on the one hand, or the little trellised arch that leads out of the idyllic garden on the other, to say that it would be the better for escaping from these limitations if it could, is for nine novels out of ten an impracticable counsel of perfection ?

MISS UNWIN

But you told us, Sir John, that there

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was some other way to the universal—
some other means of escape from the
social point of view to the human.

SIR JOHN

When I said that, I was thinking of
several things. I believe we are all of
us going back to London to-morrow.
Let us arrange a meeting there ; and
I will then try to explain myself.

MISS UNWIN

And mind you keep my secret. Let
nobody know that I wrote my book.
I would sooner die than become a
literary lioness.

V

[SIR JOHN PRICHARD'S *house in London.* SIR JOHN, MISS UNWIN *and* MR UNWIN *at supper after the play.*]

MISS UNWIN

I never saw *The School for Scandal* acted before.

SIR JOHN

I hope you were pleased. I thought it very fairly acted.

MISS UNWIN

The only thing of which I felt inclined to complain was the fascination exercised over me by a man a few stalls off. He distracted my attention during several of the best scenes ; and

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when I go to bed I feel quite sure I shall dream of him. Well, Sir John, everyone has her fate!

SIR JOHN

Which man was he? Whereabouts did he sit? Tell me, that I may at once be jealous of him.

MISS UNWIN

He had rather dreamy eyes—yes, Sir John, dreamy eyes; hair rough, and of uncertain colour, like a Dandie Dinmont's when it's just come out of a rabbit-hole. He was in evening dress, and he wore a pair of brown silk gloves.

SIR JOHN

That man, was it? Why, my dear Miss Adeline, I know him; and to tell you the truth, I was thinking of asking him to supper. That's Foster Johnson, the great literary critic. He's the oracle

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of the *Pantheon*. He has no doubt reviewed your book in it.

MISS UNWIN

He has. His review was sent to me ; and do you know what he said about it ? He said that if it had not been for its almost grotesque vulgarity, its dulness was so unrelieved that no one could wade through it.

MR UNWIN

Well, my dear Adeline, his gloves are an explanation. A creature in evening dress with a pair of brown silk gloves on would naturally fail to be amused at anything that amuses us. Your book would be as unintelligible to him as if it had been written in Chinese.

SIR JOHN

And yet, as you may have noticed,

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he was amused at *The School for Scandal*.

MR UNWIN

Yes—so was the gallery.

SIR JOHN

Precisely, so was the gallery. Now, my dear Miss Adeline, as you're not sore about the matter—and I see you are not, for your eyes are dancing with laughter—you must let me tell you that in some ways Johnson's judgment is excellent. Why, then, did he fail to appreciate your book? Simply because he would feel that the whole social tone of it was somehow or other an implied affront to himself. He calls you vulgar for having written it, because it makes him feel vulgar when he reads it—just as you would make him feel, however civil you might be, if he had the good luck now to be sitting next you at supper. But that's not my point.

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What I want to ask you is this: Why does Mr Johnson, who is irritated by your delightful novel, simply because he feels there is a superfine air of high life about it, enjoy *The School for Scandal*, and not feel irritated at all by it, when the play and the novel deal with just the same sort of society? Here, however, we come to a point that was raised by you; and I'll tell you the way in which I answer the question myself. *The School for Scandal*, though it represents the manners of an exclusive class, appeals to a wider public than the novels of your sister, of Miss Austen, or even of Dickens, because it represents these manners not less exclusively than the novels do, but more exclusively. Do you understand my meaning?

MR UNWIN

To tell you the truth, Sir John, I can't say that I do.

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MISS UNWIN

I do—or I think I do.

SIR JOHN

Ah, Miss Adeline, your own conscience enlightens you. What I mean is, that any set of manners may be taken as a symbol of the universal, so long as it is not specialised by being intentionally contrasted with another set. In the comedy of *The School for Scandal* there is practically an entire absence of the comedy of friction between classes whose manners are slightly different. There are no characters in it, Miss Adeline, like your clergyman's vulgar wife, who tries to give herself the manners of a fine lady. She is, by the way, one of the best things in your book—better even than Mrs Elton in Miss Austen's *Emma*. There is no caricature. Every touch is delicate. But still, by introducing

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her, you specialise your point of view. You narrow the public by whom your book will be appreciated. Sheridan does nothing of the kind. He gives all his principal characters the best manners he can ; but he does not suggest that they are better than the manners of anybody else.

MISS UNWIN

I felt sure you meant that ; but I think if your argument is intended to apply to novels, it is ingenious rather than practical. If a novel is to give any comprehensive picture of life, you can hardly make all your characters belong to one narrow section of society ; and if you make them belong to the most numerous and the least educated section of it, you at once introduce, as you yourself told us, a contrast of manners by the contrast between the dialect of the characters and the correct language of the narrative.

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MR UNWIN

In a play it is easy to eliminate this contrast, and to make the manners of all the characters the same; partly because a play is a short thing, and partly because, even in a comedy written in prose, it is possible, without destroying the illusion, to raise the language of everybody to something like the same level. Think, for a moment, of the footman of Charles Surface, who offers to give the moneylender a mortgage on some of his master's winter clothes, with equity of redemption before November. This is excellent in a play, but in a novel it would be impossible and incredible.

SIR JOHN

A very true piece of criticism. I always feel that it is impossible to talk about literature without opening up questions which, in one way or another,

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concern all the processes of the human mind and imagination. However, let us keep to one point at a time. I agree that this unifying of manners is more difficult in a novel than in a play ; but even in novels it can be done to a great extent. To a great extent, for instance, it is done by Miss Austen herself. Much of her comedy, it is true, turns on the difference between people of superior and people of inferior breeding ; but much of it also—and I think the best of it—takes place between people who, in point of breeding, are similar. There is no finer comedy in the English language than that of Mr Collins's proposal to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*. But Mr Collins is absurd, not because of his manners but because of his character.

MISS UNWIN

That's perfectly true. You are reading me a valuable lesson ; and I will,

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for the future, concentrate my literary attention on the absurdities of my own friends, and particularly of my own relations. But still, Sir John—seriously—take *Pride and Prejudice* as a whole. What would it be if you took away the vulgarities of Mrs Bennet, as compared with the good manners of her husband—if you took away Uncle Philips, and the gentilities of Sir William Lucas?

SIR JOHN

I don't say that my counsel of perfection is a completely practicable one. I will confine myself to saying this—that, in so far as the novelist of contemporary life can, without ceasing to represent manners as they actually are, eliminate the differences which are due to differences of manners only, his work will gain, by his doing so, not only in width, but in depth, and if he succeeds, under such conditions, in his

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comedy and his drawing of characters, his comedy and his drawing of characters will be of the highest and finest kind. Even though his incidents be confined to the lives of the most limited class, his representation of them will have the universality of poetry. Indeed, I should say that a universality of this kind is attainable only in novels in which people of the higher classes form the principal characters.

MISS UNWIN

My feelings agree with you there ; but I should like to know your reasons.

SIR JOHN

My reasons are these—there are three of them : The manners of the higher classes are, in the first place, the most polished manners ; in the second place—quite contrary to the absurd misconception of the vulgar—they are

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the simplest manners ; and, in the third place, they are the most uniform manners. They thus form the most delicate medium through which the idiosyncrasies of character can be exhibited. This was Lord Macaulay's opinion, as you may read in his essay on Mme. d'Arblay. It is easy enough, he says, to give variety to persons of your drama, if you mark them off from one another by marked differences in their manners. The supreme achievement of art is to make the difference equally distinct between various persons, all of whom are as well-bred as Lord Chesterfield. And art, he says, of this kind has been achieved, among English writers, in a supreme degree by two—of whom the first is Shakespeare, and the second of whom is Miss Austen. Now, what I am anxious to 'impress upon you is this—that when such a result is achieved the fine manners of the characters are valuable, not be-

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cause they represent the peculiarities of a fine class, but because they are the finest medium through which we can represent the characteristics of human nature.

MISS UNWIN

My dear Sir John, I'm afraid you are very discouraging. You are describing an ideal which is beyond the reach of most of us.

SIR JOHN

Of course I am. Even Shakespeare and Miss Austen could but realise it partially.

MR UNWIN

Well, what should you say of the historical novels of Dumas?

SIR JOHN

You must please to remark that everything I have been saying about

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the matter applies only to novels of contemporary life. When the date of the action is distant, the manners of all the characters will appear to all classes of readers in much the same light, just as a distant object will to two spectators who may happen to be standing a hundred yards apart ; whereas a near object would exhibit to them two opposite sides.

MR UNWIN

Let us take Scott, then : not novels like *Ivanhoe*, but novels of the life of his own time like *The Antiquary*. What novel can make a more universal appeal than that ?

SIR JOHN

It doesn't make an appeal so wide as *Robinson Crusoe*. I should say that in *The Antiquary* we have a distinct standard of manners, which limits the appeal of the book to a certain extent,

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as it is ; and would limit it more if it were not for one thing—no, for two things. For I grant you the appeal of Scott goes far towards universality. But Scott doesn't break through the limitation we are speaking of. He gets round it. In the first place, though he doesn't ignore, or get rid of, the differences between class and class, he transfigures them by a noble kindliness, and makes union out of them, not division.

MISS UNWIN

That's one for me. And how, if you please, does he get round them in the second place?

SIR JOHN

He softens and gets rid of their differences by enveloping them in a common atmosphere. He is one of the few novelists who create an atmosphere. Dickens is another. If

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ever I give an address on a literary subject again, I think I shall take Atmosphere in Fiction for my subject.

MISS UNWIN

Well—now we're on the brink of an entirely new question. But I oughtn't to keep the carriage waiting any longer. Before you deliver your address, you shall rehearse it to me in private. Mind, Sir John, that's a promise ; and if you don't keep it, I shall think that your vows are worth nothing, and that you were not fit to have been my god-father.

VI

[*Kensington Gardens.*—SIR JOHN PRICHARD *and*
MISS UNWIN *walking.*]

SIR JOHN

And so you are leaving London very early this year. I don't know what I shall do without my accomplished god-daughter.

MISS UNWIN

Yes, we go to Scotland directly ; and, as my brother has asked you to stay with us, you needn't be without your god - daughter for many weeks longer than you are inclined to be. But of course you wouldn't care to come to us before the Twelfth.

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SIR JOHN

The Twelfth is nothing to me. I have lived beyond the reach of its influence. But if sport is short, Parliament and business are long. I can hardly fancy Miss Adeline thirty miles away from a railway. Still, I hope that in August I may have the good luck to find her there.

MISS UNWIN

My dear Sir John, do you think I look such a Cockney? I'm as much at home in the Highlands as I am within the four-mile radius; and to tell you the truth—though I daresay you won't believe me—I like a loch and a mountain better than Eaton Square. I always think London the most hideous place in the world.

SIR JOHN

But not Kensington Gardens, on a summer day like this?

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MISS UNWIN

There are exceptions to everything—even to one's prejudices. Yes—this is pretty. Let us sit down under that tree. I like London best when the air is not too clear. The hideous opposite side of our own unlovely square was almost beautiful in the hazy sunlight this morning. There's a haze in the air still; and for the first time in my life I fancy I can see some beauty in the Albert Memorial. And look at those children. They seem part of the haze, too. They might be figures out of a fairy tale or Shakespeare's Forest of Arden. But I own that the times when I think London looks best—

SIR JOHN

By the way, that reminds me—

MISS UNWIN

Yes; reminds you of what?

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SIR JOHN

Nothing. I'll tell you presently.
Go on with what you were saying.

MISS UNWIN

I was merely going to say that I think London looks best in November. It's astonishing what colours there are in a November mist. I have seen it make Pont Street look as if it was built of violets, and the Hotel Cecil like a palace built by genii. There is something, too, in these mists that is more than their mere colouring: they seem to make London one—to give it a corporate character—to make it as a whole something unlike Paris as a whole.

SIR JOHN

Well—and Paris, how do you get your corporate impression of that?

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MISS UNWIN

Not from its mists, I think ; but one gets it, somehow, from the air, which breathes everywhere. It is like the common soul of the place. One gets it from the smells of roasting coffee, the smells of the bakers' shops, of the trees in the Champs Elysées. Every country has its particular smell. Scotland has ; the Highlands have. Nothing excites my imagination so much as the smell of peat smoke, blown down some bare hillside from the thatch of some crofter's cottage. It always, when I smell it, sets me thinking of Charles Edward. There's a vague sense of romance in the air of every corrie.

SIR JOHN

Do you remember our conversation at supper after *The School for Scandal* ?

MISS UNWIN

Yes ; and you didn't finish it. You

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broke off with saying that you would explain to me, at the next opportunity, how Dickens, in spite of the limits of his social sympathy, contrived to make the appeal of his novels so universal.

SIR JOHN

You have just now been giving—I won't say my explanation of how he did so, but an analogy by which my explanation may be illustrated. I said he united all the different classes he described by investing them with a common atmosphere; and I said, you may recollect, that Scott did the same thing. Well, I can put that now in almost your own language. These writers did for the life described by them what you say that a mist does for London; and what the air, scented with peat-smoke and memories, does for the Highlands. Dickens invested his world with a unifying English atmosphere. Scott invested his with

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a unifying atmosphere of Scotland. What each of these two writers did was not merely to write so many different novels, but to create a world to which the characters of the different novels belonged; and this world was a greater creation than any one of their characters. To open a book of Dickens' is not like opening a book, but like coming back to one's own country from abroad. The smell of England—all the complicated associations of its national life, and the idiosyncrasies of its people, breathe from the pages. To open a novel of Scott which deals with Scotland is like going in a train across the Border in the air of a misty morning.

MISS UNWIN

I confess, now I come to think of it, that if I never had read Scott I shouldn't have for the Highlands the sentiment I have now—or indeed for the Lowlands

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either. I know the house—it is really not far from the Border—which he had in his mind when he described the Baron of Bradwardine's. There are leaden bears on the gables of the stables still. When I went into the courtyard I seemed to be walking into Waverley. I know many of the little towns on the East Coast. Every one of them seems to me to be Mr Old-buck's Fairport.

SIR JOHN

Think, too, of the Highland chieftain. Scott interpreted him to the world. You never read, I daresay, a book of letters by an English officer, written from Inverness after the rebellion of '45. A Highland chieftain and his house are described there. The English officer visited him, and described very accurately all he saw. But he only saw the letter; he did not understand the spirit. Smollett, a little later, de-

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scribed a chieftain's house also ; but he describes the life there only as something that was curious. It needed the genius of Scott to expose the heart, the meaning, the poetry of it ; and he did this—he could do this—only by expressing the general life of which the chieftain formed a part. He makes it live for us by placing it in its native atmosphere. And just as the air of Scotland has been re-created by him in his books, so do his books pervade all the air of Scotland. Though he views life personally from the standpoint of the old feudal families, this limits his appeal but little. He is not a man ; he is a nation—he is all its classes in one.

MISS UNWIN

You can't say that of Dickens ; for, whatever he was, he was not a gentleman. At all events, he could not create one. About Scott I understand you ; and I feel the truth of what you say. I

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never heard you instruct me with so much enthusiasm before.

SIR JOHN

Scott was a noble man. I admire him at sixty-five, more even than I did when I first read him at fifteen. He was a greater man in many respects than Dickens. He understood the lowest class of his countrymen as well as Dickens did; and he understood the highest class thoroughly, which Dickens never understood at all. And yet, in some respects, Dickens was greater than Scott. Dickens was far more fertile in the creation of various characters.

MISS UNWIN

Yes, but we're not talking of characters now. We're talking about what you call the creation of a national atmosphere.

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SIR JOHN

Well, no one excelled to the same degree as Dickens did in investing inanimate objects with a national, with a human significance. Think of his many descriptions of the Thames under its various aspects—of the barges, the shipping, the warehouses. The river, as he presents it to us, becomes a type of England. Think of the taverns, the bars, and the courtyards of inns which he impregnates, by his descriptions, with all the life that has been lived in them. A lawyer's office with its ink-stains and its dusty twilight becomes under the magic of his touch more living than the characters of most novelists. He paints the London wind and the raw air of Christmas. He creates an atmosphere with which all his characters are congruous, out of which they seem to emerge, and which gives to them all a unity.

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MISS UNWIN

You say that his characters are more various than those of Scott. Don't you think that may be because all his characters are caricatures ; whereas none of Scott's are ?

SIR JOHN

Except in his serious characters, which are his weakest ones, and which one can hardly take seriously, Dickens did no doubt exaggerate to a grotesque extent—that is to say, if you judge them by the standards of prosaic realism. But they are all in harmony with the world which he has created for their reception, and with one another ; and as long as you remain in his world their grotesqueness disappears, and their effect on the imagination corresponds with the effect of truth. I think, too, that by this exaggeration itself he widens their appeal to his readers.

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MISS UNWIN

He gives them the sort of absurdity at which one laughs, or does not laugh, in a farce. But Scott makes one laugh without any of this distortion. I don't suppose any architect was ever as grotesque as Mr Pecksniff.

SIR JOHN

I said the other day to you that in his humorous pictures of life, Dickens exhibited life to his readers from the standpoint, tacitly assumed, of persons in a superior position. But if Dickens had painted Mr Pecksniff without any exaggeration at all, the vast number of people in Mr Pecksniff's own position would have failed to see the moral comedy of his character. By exaggerating him Dickens places him at a distance from such readers. He places him below them; and he thus enables

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them to occupy the detached position of critics. This, however, I say by the way. My point here is that the principal means employed by him for making his appeal universal is not any device, such as that I have just described, for placing his readers at the same centre of social sympathy; but it is the art by which he envelops them all in the same national atmosphere—an atmosphere charged with all the possibilities which his characters actualise.

MISS UNWIN

And how should you say that this miracle was accomplished? You see, being a novelist myself, I am very anxious to learn the tricks of the trade.

SIR JOHN

As to Dickens's device of exaggerating the manners of his characters,

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this is the converse of Sheridan's art, which reduces or raises them all to the same level. Both are means of universalising what in actual life is special. I shouldn't advise you, my dear Miss Adeline, to try the method of exaggeration. As to creating an atmosphere, I doubt if that could be done by any single book. Scott and Dickens have each accomplished the feat, not by writing any one book, but by producing an entire literature, and to appreciate any of their best novels you ought really to be acquainted with the whole.

MISS UNWIN

Ah, Sir John, my poor hopes of immortality! What will become of them? I shall never touch a pen again. Do you think, if she scribbled every day for ten years, your helpless, unhappy god-daughter would ever produce an atmosphere?

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SIR JOHN

I am going to quote to you four words in Latin: 'Non omnia possumus omnes': We can't all do everything. Miss Austen never produced an atmosphere. Thackeray never did. Shakespeare never did—not in the way that Scott did. I think this reflection on the limitations of others may be refreshing to you. Remember, too, that though Scott could do so much that was beyond Miss Austen's reach, Scott admitted that Miss Austen could do what was for ever beyond his. She is your natural mistress; and my advice to you is this, follow your own instincts, and try to paint the life with which you are yourself acquainted, and of which you are such a keen observer. If you do that your characters will naturally have polished manners. But don't make it too much of a point that their

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manners are better than other people's. You will lose some comedy, I admit, by not doing this; but, after all, the true comedy of life lies, not in social differences, but in our inexhaustible moral absurdities. And yet, Miss Adeline, and yet—

MISS UNWIN

Yes, Sir John. Yet—what?

SIR JOHN

The sort of comedy which I ask you to forego was so good in your novel that I shall be almost as pleased to find you neglecting my advice as I should be to find you acting on it.

VII

[*Waiting-room at the Savoy Hotel. Time, 8 p.m.*
SIR JOHN PRICHARD and MISS UNWIN.]

MISS UNWIN

Well! so this is the last of my London gaieties. We start to-morrow night for the Highlands from King's Cross.

SIR JOHN

I hope your last gaiety will be pleasant ; although, as you have come with your host, you may have to wait a quarter of an hour for the others, and your last gaiety will be embittered by being a moral lesson in patience.

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MISS UNWIN

It's a pleasant exercise of patience to sit here and watch these people. Ah, there are the Catesbys. They are waiting just as we are. And look, Sir John, here comes the newest of American beauties. It's Alec Gordon who's with her. She's just taking off her cloak. She's pretty, extraordinarily pretty ; but that other woman is prettier — the woman in black, with beautiful clear-cut features. Who can her companion be — that hook-nosed, pudding-faced man, with the enormous stud in his shirt, and the three undulating chins? If it wasn't for him she might be anybody. And here's Lady Ursula Masters, followed, of course, by the usual inevitable escort, and looking as if butter would not melt in her mouth. I'm told she dines here every night of her life. I wonder—but no! I won't say what I was going to say.

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SIR JOHN

Carlyle said that wonder was one of our highest faculties. Don't stifle it. Let me hear what it is you wonder about.

MISS UNWIN

I was going to say something that sounds horribly ungracious and ungrateful. I was going to say I wonder why people who have excellent houses and the best cooks of their own have developed such a passion for having their dinners at restaurants.

SIR JOHN

Are you a novelist and a student of human nature, and yet you can't answer a simple question like that? Between a dinner-party in a private house and a dinner-party in a place like this there is the same difference for some people that there is for an ambitious author between

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a book privately circulated and a book puffed and published. They are not content with enjoying themselves. They like to be famous when they are doing so. They like to exhibit themselves to all the people they do know; and they like—for they have the fine faculty of wonder—they like to wonder at the enigmatic people they do not know. I am bound to say, however, that their wonder is unlike Carlyle's. It is not the wonder of adoration. It is the wonder of patronising curiosity.

MISS UNWIN

So far as that goes I believe that I myself agree with them; though I don't know that my wonder can be called patronising. To see groups of people like these, about whom one knows nothing, is like peering down so many avenues of social surprise and mystery. At a private party we see one world. We have here glimpses of many. Every

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class is a kind of fairyland to every other class. In the atmosphere of the socially unknown we feel as if anything might happen. One might find a dealer in bric-à-brac who would sell one a *peau de chagrin*. I am like a Balzac surrounded by the germs of a hundred possible romances. I only wish that in a place like this one saw something more of what one means by Bohemia.

SIR JOHN

What *do* you mean by Bohemia? Do you feel, now you are a celebrated authoress, that ordinary society is tame? And do you long for a Quartier Latin peopled with men of genius, in odd velveteen coats, who dine in Soho and who smoke pipes in the street? Or do you call anyone a Bohemian who is not of your own society? Do you call the hook-nosed, pudding-faced man a Bohemian?

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MISS UNWIN

Certainly not *him*. He is bursting with unsuccessful conventionality. No—I mean by Bohemians people who, in virtue of their talents, rise out of their own class, or break away from it, and abandon its traditions, manners and conventions without adopting those of any other class.

SIR JOHN

You wouldn't say, then, that they formed a class by themselves?

MISS UNWIN

No, no. Don't be tiresome. You know what I mean by a class. I mean people connected by birth, natural position, education, common habits and associations—people who have a certain social uniformity in spite of their different mental idiosyncrasies. My idea of Bohemia is a society made of people with more or less the same

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mental idiosyncrasies, but with no social uniformity except that of abandoning the habits in which they have been brought up. My idea of Bohemia is a society in which each man is a law to himself.

SIR JOHN

I doubt if you would care much for people such as these if you met them. Surely, if you want to meet intellectual company, you can meet it without going out of the ordinary beaten track. A thinker or a writer does not think or write the worse because, besides being a thinker or a writer, he is also a politician or a diplomatist ; nor need a poet be a worse poet because he is so much a man of the world that he thinks bad poetry more tolerable than bad breeding.

MISS UNWIN

No ; but, all the same, I feel a curiosity about men whose literary,

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whose poetical, whose intellectual interests are so strong that the ordinary conventions and prejudices of life are indifferent to them, and who do not suggest to you the question of whether they are well bred or not because they are outside the region in which breeding means anything. I daresay people like this exist only in my own imagination; but I often think it would be pleasant to meet somebody who was really gifted, but to whom one could not possibly talk about one's friends, and about parties, and about the follies one commits daily; and would be forced to talk about things that were more important because these were the only things that he understood and cared for. It seems to me that, for the time being, one would be getting into a freer air. Why do you laugh, Sir John? Have I said anything very idiotic?

SIR JOHN

I was laughing because presently you

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will be able to put your philosophy to the test. I have asked someone who is something of a Bohemian to dine with us. I did not tell you before because I thought I should have to apologise for doing so. I am glad to find that instead I shall have to ask you to thank me.

MISS UNWIN

Who is he?

SIR JOHN

He's a poet—and it seems he is a very unpunctual poet. He's read your novel. I told him you were devoted to poetry. He saw your photograph at my house, and he's dying and sighing to see you. Ah! here's your brother. I must leave you just for a moment and speak to the head waiter.

(SIR JOHN *goes and* MR UNWIN *enters.*)

MR UNWIN

Ah! Adeline, so it seems that I am

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the first. Who are the others? Sir John said we should be six.

MISS UNWIN

Lord Delvin is one.

MR UNWIN

A poet! That's in honour of you.

MISS UNWIN

Molly Maitland's another.

MR UNWIN

A poetess, whose fine frenzy is mitigated by the best French dress-makers. How talent clings to talent! Our dinner-table will be a complete Parnassus—for Sir John himself was a poet till banking and office sobered him.

MISS UNWIN

But that's not all. There's another poet, too—some new volcano which still is in full eruption. Sir John's

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not told me his name. Here's Molly at last.

(MRS MAITLAND *enters, conscious of creating a sensation.*)

MRS MAITLAND (*to* MISS UNWIN)

Well, my dear, so I've found you. It makes me so shy coming to a place like this alone. An over-fed stock-broker puffed his cigar at me on the stairs; and a moon-struck nondescript made such eyes at me on the landing that I am still feeling doubtful whether I look like a goddess or a scarecrow. But it's better in here. Most of the people, I suppose, have gone in to dinner. Aren't we all very late?

MISS UNWIN

There's an unquiet spirit still waiting for somebody.

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MRS MAITLAND

If he's waiting for a woman, I don't wonder he's waiting. Who would keep an appointment with a man with a coat like that? I can't see his face, but he's peeping at it himself in the looking-glass. Ah, poor man! his reward has come at last. He sees his fate, and he has gone out to meet her. Her!—my dear Adeline, it's a he. How flat! Why, I declare it's Sir John. What extraordinary people he knows.

MISS UNWIN

It is not he who's been looking for *his* fate. It's my belief it's we who've been looking at ours.

SIR JOHN (*re-entering with his arm
on the stranger's shoulder*)

We won't wait for Delvin. It's nearly half-past eight now. This is Mr Maurice Beranger, whose poetry

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you have all read, and I hope he will think that I am introducing him into very excellent company. Mr Beranger, this lady is Mrs Maitland. I know you have read her verses. This lady is Miss Unwin; and this is Miss Unwin's brother—both admirers, though not cultivators, of the Muses.

MR BERANGER (*bowing*)

Very happy. It's a privilege. Miss Unwin, ever since I read her book, has been a great heroine of mine.

MRS MAITLAND (*aside to MISS UNWIN*)

My dear, he pays the first compliments to you, but he makes the first eyes at me.

SIR JOHN

Well, dinner is ready. Shall we come?

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*(They pass into the restaurant and sit
down at their table.)*

MR BERANGER *(leaning back carelessly
in his chair)*

I was dreadfully afraid, Sir John, I shouldn't be able to come at all. These ladies will hardly guess why. It's not very often I care to wear evening clothes, and it was only at the last moment I was able to borrow these. It's a theory of mine, Mrs Maitland, that if a man would write as he likes, he ought to dress as he likes.

MR UNWIN

But suppose a man likes to wear evening clothes. In that case you would admit that he'd write better for wearing them.

MR BERANGER

The man who likes to wear evening

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clothes, when he can possibly avoid doing so, will rarely like to write poetry that is worth reading.

MISS UNWIN

Tell us why.

MRS MAITLAND

We're all dying to hear.

MR BERANGER (*butting his fingers
through his hair*)

To begin with, evening clothes mean dinner at the fashionable hour. Later on in the evening they mean stifling balls and parties, and an inferno of artificial glitter. You ladies hardly suspect, perhaps, that when you are beginning to imprison yourselves in this unreal world, London begins to grow wild with romance and beauty. The buildings turn into piles of violet vapour. The twilight streets whisper with all the possibilities of existence.

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The human beings one meets, because one knows nothing about them, are dissociated from all the banal relations of society and routine; and each is a moving mystery — fresh, strange, wonderful—an unread volume of romance, tragedy, or adventure.

MRS MAITLAND

There's plenty of adventure, no doubt, in this room to-night. I recognised several adventures as we came in.

MR BERANGER

Adventures adulterated with convention—adventure in a strait-waistcoat. I should not say what I am saying—I wouldn't venture on such a shock to the *convenances*—if it were not that we all of us here feel some interest in poetry. I speak as a poet; I don't refer to my performances. I speak of myself only as a poet by temperament;

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and poetry—Sir John, this champagne is a drink for the gods—poetry deals with the abstracted essence of existence. In the conventional life this essence is lost in the accidental. Poetry, in fact, is the music of the unconventional; and if in habits and dress we clothe ourselves in the conventional livery, we are no more fit to go where that music is to be heard than Mrs Maitland and Miss Unwin are fit at this moment to encounter a drenching rain or the sleet of a winter's night. The poet is a moral, an intellectual, and, above all, a social vagabond.

SIR JOHN

There he is at last—our belated guest looking for us. I will go to him, or he'll never find us.

(SIR JOHN *goes towards* LORD DELVIN, *who is in a distant part of the room.*)

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MR BERANGER

That's the reason why so much of the finest poetry of the day receives so little attention. People don't understand what true poetry is. They are still demoralised by the bourgeois conventionality of Tennyson. Listen to this now. It's by a young fellow, a friend of mine—whom you, Mrs Maitland, never heard of; nor you, Miss Unwin—who's having his supper now at some street corner coffee-stall. Don't you call this exquisite? (MR BERANGER *recites in a hollow voice, to the astonishment of two waiters.*)

With raddled cheeks she goes, and tawdry plume,
The flotsam of the gas-lit gloom.
Some leer, some jeer, and some—ah, deeper
shame!—

Forsooth would rescue and reclaim
Her—her! Poor impotent priest, you know not
whom.

You rescue *her*! Those soiled rags hide a queen—
The immortal, the imperial Messaline.
Put up your shivering tracts; or, rather, shed

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Your tracts for flowers beneath her tread.
 Beneath her rags is gold.
 She bears, as once of old,
 Her loved Saburra to the purple-red
Divan made soft for Cæsar's cassiaed head.
Shower down more tracts. This is no Queen of
 Rome.
This is the body born of Cyprian foam.
 This is the ageless She
Whose lights to beakèd triremes on the sea
 Twinkled from Paphos. These same Cockney
 lips
 Long ago mourned for Thammuz—
Ah—magnificent—grand—magnificent!

SIR JOHN (*returning with* LORD DELVIN)

Here we here. God bless me! the
bard is at work already. We had
better stop that. Every soul in the
place will be staring at us. (MR
BERANGER'S *recitation collapses.*)

MRS MAITLAND

My dear Lord Delvin, whilst we've
been listening to poetry you must have
been dreaming about it. Here is your

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place waiting for you—here by your devoted me.

SIR JOHN

I must introduce to you Mr Beranger. Mr Beranger, this is Lord Delvin.

LORD DELVIN (*poet and ex-diplomatist, placing his hand on MR BERANGER'S shoulder*)

My dear fellow, this is indeed a pleasure. Only last night I was reading your 'Daughters of Twilight' and your 'Paradise of Grisettes.' No, no, I don't want soup; let me have fish—anything. I generally dine myself at two o'clock in the morning.

MR BERANGER

I sometimes dine at three. It is then that the imagination—

LORD DELVIN

Ah, Miss Unwin, how are you? If

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the Greeks had been novelists they would have made you their eleventh muse. You, Mrs Molly (*he puts his hand on* MRS MAITLAND'S), as we all know, are the tenth.

MISS UNWIN

Well, and have you recovered from the dissipation of Ascot? I didn't know that you ever patronised races.

MRS MAITLAND

Nor I. We've just been hearing that poets must never be conventional. I feel in the depths in consequence. I am glad that I have you for company.

LORD DELVIN

Has Mr Beranger been giving you the philosophy of the poet's life? I'm sorry I missed that. I'm quite sure I should agree with him. I missed, too, some verses he was repeating. Indeed,

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I fear I interrupted him; but this infernal band makes such a deafening noise, I should not have heard them anyhow. I'm staying in this hotel. What would Sir John say if, after dinner, we went up to my sitting-room, and discussed our contemporary poets and the poetic life there?

VIII

[LORD DELVIN'S *sitting-room in the Savoy Hotel.*
LORD DELVIN *and* MR BERANGER, *the poet,*
are entering, followed by SIR JOHN PRICHARD,
MRS MAITLAND *and* MR *and* MISS UNWIN.]

LORD DELVIN (*to Servant*)

Bring some whisky and some siphons.
My dear fellow, do you drink absinthe?
(*To MR BERANGER.*)

MRS MAITLAND (*to MR UNWIN*)

Our poet has done himself so well at dinner that he's forgotten himself as a shy man, and remembers himself only as a poet. I'm glad Sir John stopped him from spouting any more verses in the restaurant.

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MR UNWIN

If the essence of Christianity is to forget oneself, he was fast forgetting himself into a high degree of saintliness.

LORD DELVIN

Come, my dear Miss Unwin, I will wheel up some armchairs; and now Mr Beranger will 'fit audience find, though few.' He was saying to me as we came upstairs—and I'm sure we poets should be all anxious to believe him—that the public imagines we have no good poets left among us, because the public is quite incapable of knowing good poetry when it sees it.

MR BERANGER

That's partly owing to a defect inherent in the public at all times; but it is partly due to the low condition of criticism, and this is due to the con-

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dition of the daily press. Newspaper critics!—critics! You can't call them critics—except a few, a brilliant few of them. Putting these aside, not one of them knows what poetry is, except those who have tried, and have utterly failed to write it—and they know it only as something that they can't write themselves. Give the average newspaper critic a good book of poems to review, and the poor devil, unless he knows the author and is jealous of him, has no idea what to say of it. It simply puzzles him. He can't tell whether it's exquisite or execrable. He knows no more about it than a Sunday-school teacher knows of the Derby favourite. But he must say something; above all, he must find some fault with it; for that's the sole way in which he can prove his superiority to the writer, and his consequent right to criticise him. And what do these dunces do? They one and all

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of them do the same thing. Pick up any ninth-rate review, that is nine out of every ten of all the reviews written, and what will you find? You will find that these imbeciles, when they want to show their discrimination, fall foul of the poet's rhymes, and the rhymes they fall foul of are nearly always perfectly good ones.

SIR JOHN

I quite agree, Mr Beranger, with that stricture of yours. It is quite unnecessary, in the finest poetry in the world, that all the rhymes should be perfect. It is sufficient that they should be good enough.

MR BERANGER

I was reading a review the other day of some exquisite poems by a friend of mine—a perfect jewel-work of words and thoughts. The review dismissed the volume in ten lines; and of these

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lines five were occupied in remarking that the poet made 'gaze' rhyme with 'face,' and 'heath' with 'death.'

LORD DELVIN

Half the beauties of rhyme are due to these subtle varieties. No rhyme is bad that does not subject language to gross mispronunciation, such as 'morning' and 'dawning.' And yet even Swinburne, in one of his most beautiful lyrics, has used this rhyme himself:—

'As when late larks give warning
Of dying lights and dawning,
Night whispers to the morning—'

MR BERANGER

Ay, Lord Delvin—and this scoundrelly scribbler I was speaking of, he began with sneering at my friend by comparing him to the faultless Tennyson, if you please; and who uses this very rhyme 'heath' and 'death' but Tennyson himself?

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SIR JOHN

Then, too, we have Mrs Browning. Her poem on the death of Pan, though too long, is in parts magnificent. Do you recall these lines?—

‘Aphrodite dead and driven
As thy native foam thou art,
With the cestus long done heaving
On the white calm of thy heart.’

Or, again, these to Apollo?—

‘Neath the clanging of thy bow
Niobe looked lost as thou!’

I’ve no doubt, Mr Beranger, that your average newspaper critic of to-day would have nothing—actually nothing—to say of these two passages, except that ‘We would suggest to the lady, the next time she puts pen to paper, that *driven* does not rhyme with *heaving*, and *bow* does not rhyme with *thou*.’

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MR BERANGER (*sipping a glass of
absinthe*)

Hear, hear, Sir John! An admirable criticism—quite admirable!

SIR JOHN

Then, again, your friends, the critics, when the somewhat unfortunate poem on the relief of Mafeking, by our present Poet Laureate, appeared the other day—

MR BERANGER (*under his breath*)

The Poet Laureate! You call him a poet!

SIR JOHN

I don't defend that poem; but of all its faults those over which the critics made most merry were the least important, if, indeed, they were faults at all—namely, some of his rhymes. It never seemed to occur to these absurd gentlemen that in Lord Tennyson's

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‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ there was one rhyme—‘hundred’ and ‘thundered’—incomparably worse than any of Mr Austin’s, and yet nobody thinks the worse of Lord Tennyson’s poem for that.

MR BERANGER

Nay, but, Sir John, surely now you don’t call the Poet Laureate a poet at all?

SIR JOHN

The actual merit of his poetry I won’t discuss; but one thing I will say of him without hesitation. Even if he has not succeeded in writing a line of good poetry, he comes far nearer than any of his contemporaries to a conception of what poetry of the highest order is. He conceives of poetry as an art which shall touch and embrace actual life on all sides—which shall use as its material all life’s great activities—not only passion but intellect, political ambition, religion and philosophy.

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MR BERANGER

I call that journalism, Sir John. I don't call that poetry.

SERVANT (*entering, to LORD DELVIN*)

There's a messenger from the Foreign Office, my lord, who wishes to speak with your lordship for a moment.

LORD DELVIN

I'll come to him outside. My dear fellow (*he puts his hand on MR BERANGER'S shoulder*), keep what you have to say till I come back again. (*He goes out.*)

MR UNWIN

I confess, Mr Beranger, that I agree with Sir John. I speak as a reader, not as a writer of poetry; but I like to feel, as I do when I read Byron, that my poet is a man intimate with the concrete facts of life.

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MISS UNWIN

Lord Delvin's poetry makes you feel that. No one has seen more of men and women than he has. He is, Mr Beranger, something of a Bohemian also. Don't you admire his poetry?

MR BERANGER

A Bohemian with a star and riband—a half-hearted Bohemian! But he is full of appreciative power—engagingly, sympathetically full! As for his poetry, it's merely the experiences of a man of the world set to a piano accompaniment. I see in it nothing of any real liberation of spirit!

MRS MAITLAND

I'm afraid in Paris he showed rather too much liberation than too little. But hush—he is coming back. (*She touches MR BERANGER'S sleeve.*)

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MR BERANGER (*glancing at her fingertips*)

‘Almond - shaped and rose - leaf coloured shells!’ You remember Anactoria?

LORD DELVIN (*re-entering*)

I hope you’ve been keeping your wisdom for me. Let’s hear about poetry and journalism.

SIR JOHN

Now, Mr Beranger, go on; I am ready to be pulverised by your arguments.

MR BERANGER

Well, Lord Delvin, Sir John will have it that poetry should deal with life in the concrete. I maintain that it should deal with life in the abstract.

LORD DELVIN

I don’t call your ‘Paradise of

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Grisettes' very abstract, much as I delight in it.

MR BERANGER

Don't let us be misled by words. I will, if you like, call what I mean, not the abstract, but the universal concrete ; or let us say, rather, that poetry deals with man, as distinguished from the world—that it represents a retirement from the world, no less than religion does.

SIR JOHN

When you speak of the world what is your precise meaning?

MR BERANGER

I mean life seen through the medium of fashionable conventionality, or political, or commercial, or scientific interests—or through the medium of that worst of conventionalities, respectability. I mean life seen through

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any other medium than that of pure emotion. Emotion is the one universalising element. But this liberated and pure emotion is experienced by the few only; and that is the reason why true poetry is appreciated by the few only; and here, again, is the reason why the poetry of to-day is less popular than the poetry of yesterday. It is truer. Yes, true poetry is like some rare and precious liqueur, the subtle and delicate flavour of which the few only can appreciate. Kipling is popular, because Kipling is like beer; while the Poet Laureate is like small beer and water.

SIR JOHN

Come, Mr Beranger, what do you say to Horace? He was a poet of the world, as well as of man; or rather, he was the poet of man regarded in his relations to the world.

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You must forgive me for my Philistinism, for I am on the side of Horace; and as for our Poet Laureate, whatever we may think of his poems, his conception of poetry—which is the same as that of Horace—is essentially the right conception. I will say more: I will say that of all our living poets, he is the only one whose conception of poetry is really sound and comprehensive. I don't mind saying this to you, for two reasons. One is that you won't be offended, because you won't believe me. The other is that I hope you will come to believe me some day. Think of a poem like 'Othello.' You have no abstraction, no escape from the world there. You have the universal—true. But it is the universal shining through the particular. The particular is the medium through which the universal is brought home to us.

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(MR BERANGER *drinks.*)

MRS MAITLAND (*to* MISS UNWIN)

Don't you see how annoyed he gets when other people's works are praised. He drinks, and pretends not to hear.

MISS UNWIN

My dear, I'm afraid that he'll drink too much presently. It was all very well at first. His potations merely made him voluble. But now — do you see his eyes?

MR BERANGER

You were talking of Shakespeare. Shakespeare wrote for the stage. It was his misfortune. The stage turns poetry into a craft, the object of which is to tickle the ears of the groundlings, whether we call them pit or stalls. The dramatist must submit himself to the conventions that

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refuse and restrain. The passions are shorn of their wings, or else they bruise themselves against the bars that keep them in, and deface the glories of their butterfly-wings, or their moth-wings. I don't say that ideally a poetic drama is impossible; but the hero of it would be Pierrot, not Hamlet.

SIR JOHN

I prefer the heroes of Mr Kipling and the Poet Laureate.

MR BERANGER

Genius of Verlaine! Can he be speaking seriously? What do you say to this from my own 'Songs of Detachment'?—

'Twilight alive with feet
Along the whispering pavement of the street !
Twilight alive with eyes,
And twilight-veiled lips,
A-murmur with the unmurmurable sweet,
Passing me like my own heart multiplied.'

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LORD DELVIN

Beautiful, my dear fellow—beautiful!

MR BERANGER (*clasping his hands and
becoming more excited*)

And this too—

‘Oh, for the hour when bean-fields breathe their
musk,
The highways, and the byways, and the dusk :
And she, whom I call Evening—she whose musk-
sweet cheek
Just feels the grass-blades ’twixt her cheek and
mine.’

LORD DELVIN (*hastily interrupting*)

Exquisite—exquisite! But, Sir John,
your two ladies are, I see, anxious to
be going. My dear fellow (*to MR
BERANGER*), remain with me, and we’ll
quote verses till sunrise.

SIR JOHN (*aside to LORD DELVIN*)

I’m much obliged to you, Delvin,
for your adroit management of our
bard. I quite agree with you that

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we may as well be taking ourselves off. Now, Miss Adeline and Mrs Maitland, say good-bye to him while he still knows what he's saying.

MRS MAITLAND

I suppose it's best, but he was just beginning to be amusing.

SIR JOHN (*to MISS UNWIN in the passage*)

I'm sorry for him. Delvin shouldn't have humoured him. Poor fellow! he has a real poetic gift, but it's wasted, for he has a wholly wrong idea of what poetry and what poets are. It's the fatal misconception of nearly every minor poet. If you, your brother and Mrs Maitland will come to my house—for it's still quite early—we will finish our conversation there.

MR BERANGER (*within, still reciting*)

'And when I woke, upon her rose-pale cheek,
Rose fallen on rose, the morning slept in dew.'

I X

[SIR JOHN PRICHARD'S *library*. SIR JOHN, MISS UNWIN, MR UNWIN *and* MRS MAITLAND, *after their dinner at the Savoy Hotel.*]

SIR JOHN

I am sorry my experiment of introducing you to a poet pure and simple was not quite so successful as I hoped.

MRS MAITLAND

I'm afraid he was too simple and not sufficiently pure.

MR UNWIN

I don't think the morals of any of you have suffered much by his company.

MISS UNWIN

I'm sure, Sir John, he has not injured your god-daughter's. If Mr Beranger

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represents the devil and his works, you need have no scruple of conscience in still promising for me that I shall renounce them.

MRS MAITLAND

He really had fine eyes. He looked something like a dissipated Keats.

SIR JOHN

That's very much what he is. If you gave him Keats's genius, he would be simply a variant of Keats, for he has all Keats's weaknesses; and his weaknesses are interesting, because they are eminently typical. Keats is the best English example of the poet who is a mere poet—the mere poet whom so many people regard as the type of the true poet—the inspired solitary, with visionary eyes, who shrinks like a sensitive plant, not from the touch of the world only, but even from the touch of the intellect, and of reasoned knowledge. Now, so far as I am acquainted

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with the poets of the present day, if we except our Poet Laureate, Mr Kipling, and Mr Kipling's numerous imitators, the only poets who can be called poets at all belong to the school of which Keats may be taken as a type, and with which you have just made acquaintance in the person of our friend Mr Beranger. Look, Miss Adeline, at that table with the lamp on it. Do you see how it is strewn with beautiful little slim books — books gilded and glittering with symbolical patterns on their bindings? Those are the works of Mr Osric Beranger and his brethren; and I'm bound to say that, in point of diction, melody, and so on, many of them are extremely beautiful.

MR UNWIN

I unwillingly agree with you. I have often looked into those little books myself; and I have come to the conclusion that this typical modern poetry is

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admirable in manner in proportion as it is contemptible in matter.

SIR JOHN

I think 'contemptible' is perhaps too strong a word.

MR UNWIN

I think it is not strong enough. I should like to say 'disgusting.'

SIR JOHN

I should content myself with saying 'weak.'

MR UNWIN

All weakness is disgusting.

SIR JOHN

On the contrary, I think some weakness may be beautiful. Look at these, now. They are poems, of which many are singularly charming, though essentially they are all weak. Their

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writer is the best of the school we are now talking of. He is Mr Yeats, a most genuine poet in his way. Let me read you this, though I fear my voice will sound very tame after the passionate modulations of Mr Beranger :—

‘ Had I the heaven’s embroidered cloths,
 Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
 Of night and light and the half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet ;
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams.
I have spread my dreams under your feet.
 Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.’

MRS MAITLAND

Why do you call that weak? I only wish I could find someone weak enough to write verses like those to me.

SIR JOHN

It is weak because it exhibits passion reduced to a state of helplessness in every respect except the capacity for expressing its helplessness beautifully.

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MISS UNWIN

But helplessness of that kind is a fact of human nature. May not a strong poet express weakness dramatically, and have a dramatic though not a personal sympathy with it?

SIR JOHN

Certainly; but if you read Mr Yeats, as I have done—and he interests me, because, as I say, I consider him a typical writer—you will see that this helplessness is not dramatic at all. It animates all his poems. It is the actual source of his inspiration.

MISS UNWIN

I was reading the other day his drama, *Countess Kathleen*, and there were many passages in it which I should have thought you would call strong.

SIR JOHN

So there are; and there are many

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ideas and descriptions in it which show vivid imagination. There is one passage worthy of Marlowe. It occurs in a speech of one of the demon merchants to the other :—

‘ Hush, hush ! I hear
The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges,
And the eternal revelry floats hither
To hearten us.’

But the drama as a whole is weakness itself. It has the merit of a certain unity. It all hangs on a single thought or doctrine, which the action symbolises, and the direct expression of which forms the conclusion and the climax. But what is the doctrine? It is this: That the motive of an action is what God looks to; whilst the action itself is what the devil looks to. The Countess Kathleen sells her soul to the devil, in order that she may buy food to feed her starving peasants; and an angel *ex machinâ* is awkwardly dragged upon

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the stage to inform the characters that this sinister bargain was annulled by the heroism of its motive, and that Countess Kathleen, instead of losing her soul, had saved it. If Goethe had been founding a drama on a moral platitude like this he would, by his manner of treating it, have transfigured it into a new revelation; but Mr Yeats uses it merely like a weak thread, on which to string together verses which have no vital connection with it.

MR UNWIN

I hate symbolical dramas, and symbolism altogether.

MISS UNWIN

What do you say to *Faust*? What do you say to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*?

MR UNWIN

What I mean by a symbolical drama

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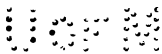
is not a drama which introduces the supernatural, or the purely imaginary. I mean by it a drama in which the characters are mere symbols—not flesh-and-blood individuals—members of actual society. In *Faust* everyone lives. Mephistopheles himself is as truly a living, a distinctive character as the Antiquary, or Mr Pecksniff, or the heroes and heroines of Miss Austen. Shakespeare in his wildest fancies never loses hold of the actual. Who are more individual than Puck and Bottom? In them, fancy does not take the place of reality, but illuminates it, like a taper inside a lantern. In Prospero's island—'the isle which was full of noises'—you have a region of symbolism, if you like; but you have symbolism in touch with metaphysics, with political philosophy, with natural theology, with broad humour, with an intimate knowledge of life—even the life of the common sailor.

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SIR JOHN

Unwin is right. Mr Yeats could not create a Prospero, a Puck, a Caliban, or Mephistopheles; partly, no doubt, because he is not a Shakespeare or a Goethe, but partly also because his whole attitude of mind is one which would render their creation impossible to him. He looks on the ideal and the symbolical—he looks, in fact, on poetry as a whole—not as a means of expressing the actual, but as a refuge—as a means of escaping from it. You may see this in *The Wanderings of Oisín*, which is full of beautiful music—a music distinctive of the writer, though in part he is indebted for it to Swinburne.

MR UNWIN

I have read that; and I'm bound in honesty to confess that I got the same sort of pleasure from it that I get from listening to the sea murmuring. 

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SIR JOHN

And what is it all? An attempt to escape into a visionary past that has no meaning for the present. Here are three or four lines, at the end of the second part, which seem to me to contain in them the whole of Mr Yeats's spirit. Listen :—

‘ Then did
Lost Niam mourn and say, “ Ah, love, we go
To the island of Forgetfulness ; for lo,
Isles of the living, and of Victories,
Ye have no power.” “ And, Niam, say of these
Which is the isle of youth ? ” “ None know,” she
said,
And on my bosom laid her weeping head.’

There you have the inner spirit of Mr Yeats himself, and of others who write almost as delicately and as musically as he. They all of them say ‘ Isles of the living, and of Victories, Ye have no power.’

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MR UNWIN

Yes, and with all of them the ideal climax is the laying of somebody's weeping head upon the bosom of somebody else, it is the dissolution of will in some semi-hysterical emotion. I quite agree with you that the language of some of these poets is beautiful. Mr Yeats has actually given some new and beautiful kinds of melody to English verse. So too has a poet, lately dead — Mr Dowson. Mr Dowson, to judge by an account of him lately published by a friend of his in the *Fortnightly Review*, must have been very much like Mr Beranger — a considerably weaker and still more depraved version of him; a true vagabond, as Mr Beranger says a poet ought to be; a man whose favourite supper-room was a cabman's shelter. Supper in a cabman's shelter seems to have been his only mentionable dissipation; and yet

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he undoubtedly wrote poetry which, in spite of its unclean weakness, still haunts my ear. I believe I was thinking of him when I said that all weakness was both contemptible and disgusting.

SIR JOHN

Sometimes this weakness, I grant you, *is* disgusting; but that is an accident. What is not an accident is, that it is weak. I should, I think, put the case thus. I should say that the distinctive characteristic of these modern poets of ours was their passivity. Instead of playing on life, they let life play upon them. Their whole attitude is one of self-abandonment, which these gentlemen typify by the act of laying their heads weeping on the breast of somebody, who probably weeps too. Indeed, many of their best poems are like so many articulate fainting fits.

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MR UNWIN

Yes ; and one feels inclined to revive them by drenching them with honest cold water.

MISS UNWIN

I think it rather hard upon Keats to call him the type of poets like these.

SIR JOHN

No one admires a great deal of Keats more than I do. If inspiration means anything, Keats was genuinely inspired ; but surely you must understand my meaning when I say that Keats is the type of these poets because his conception of the poet's character is the same as theirs. For him and for them alike the poet is a man who escapes into poetry from practical life, instead of irradiating practical life with poetry. I think I can give you a very good test by which the rank and real value of any poet can be estimated.

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Let us take the sentiments, the feelings, the appreciations, the interest which such and such a poet expresses ; and let us consider what we should think of a man whose life was made up of these, was bounded by these, or, at all events, dominated by these. Shakespeare, Goethe, Heine, Horace and, on a lower level, Pope and Dryden—all these poets exhibit in their poetry the characters, the knowledge, the pursuits of complete and remarkable men. Limit a man to those elements of his, those tastes and pursuits which are expressed in the poetry of Keats, and you get a man who, as a man, is a mere mooning imbecile. What the poetry of Keats represents is a small fraction of life—beautiful and delightful if related to something larger than itself; but if regarded as the whole, as the principal part of life, contemptible. Keats was weak as a poet, and weak as a man also, because this beautiful fraction of

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life was for him the whole, or the more important part of it. He gave us a most delicate liqueur, and asked us to accept it as a beverage. Our friend Mr Beranger, on his own admission, does the same thing. Poetry, he told us, is essentially a scented liqueur, abstracted from life. For the great poets, it is an inspiriting wine trodden from the vineyards of the richest and most varied experience; and the typical great poet as a man is not, as Keats fancied, and Mr Beranger and Mr Beranger's friends fancy, an inspired recluse, or an inspired vagabond; but he is the inspired man of the world, whether he be a courtier like Goethe or a ploughman like Burns.

X

[*The borders of a Highland loch. SIR JOHN PRICHARD, MR UNWIN and MISS UNWIN at lunch, seated on the heather.*]

SIR JOHN

Were I twenty years younger I should, I suppose, be on the hills, like your eldest brother. It is much pleasanter to be here. Old age has its compensations.

MR UNWIN

And so has premature short sight. I'm no longer any good with a rifle. Let us once be quite convinced that any kind of pleasure is impossible, and if we are true philosophers we shall find pleasure of another kind in feeling that

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our placidity is no longer disturbed by wishing for it. Half the annoyances of life are due to the fact that we want to taste more pleasures than life will give us time for, just as at a party in London we cannot enjoy conversation, because there are a dozen people or more with whom we are equally anxious to converse. It's just the same with books. Shakespeare is better than a trashy modern novel. All the same, I never turn to Shakespeare except when it happens that I've no trashy novel to read.

MISS UNWIN

Talking of reading, Sir John, do you remember the dinner you gave us the night before I started for Scotland, and the poet whom we left with Lord Delvin when he began to be too forthcoming? Molly Maitland, though I saw she was dying to flirt with him, could not quite get over the fit of his evening coat,

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which he took great pleasure in telling us he had borrowed for that occasion only. When he said that, I thought at first it was simplicity; but I saw afterwards it was bravado. Still, I did think that you and my brother were too hard on him when you both agreed that he could never be a great poet, for the simple reason he wasn't a man of the world.

SIR JOHN

You mistake what I meant; or rather, my dear young lady, you have forgotten it; for my own impression is that I took good care to explain myself. I don't mean by a man of the world only, or even specially, a man of fashion, or a man of family. Anyone may be a man of the world in the class to which he happens to belong. A peasant may be a man of the world. Many peasants are within their own limits very shrewd men of the world indeed. Many of the

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Highland peasants are more than men of the world. In a certain sense they are dignified and perfect gentlemen.

MISS UNWIN

That's because they are so perfectly simple. Knowing their position, they respect their position and themselves. They never affect to be anything they are not. And they respect the position of others in the same frank way.

MR UNWIN

That's what the ordinary novelist, who tries to describe fashionable life, knowing nothing about it, never can understand. He never can understand that fine manners are always the simplest manners. I don't mean that they are the simplest manners ideally, but that they are so as a commonplace fact. Take society—take the fashionable world ; and if you allow for flagrant exceptions, due to the overwhelming

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force of individual folly, you will find that so far as manners go these fine people are as simple as the Highland crofters.

MISS UNWIN

I think that is rather a sweeping assertion.

MR UNWIN

Not if you allow for the exceptions. In all ranks of life you will find nature's noblemen. In what we call the best society you will find nature's vulgarians. Of matters like these one can only speak generally ; and if you take the manners of the best society as a whole, one of its special characteristics is simplicity, directness, and want of self-consciousness and affectation. The manners of well-bred people, even in their easiest moments, are full of subtle deferences and restraints, which only fail to produce stiffness because they

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are absolutely instinctive. You can tell a well-bred man from an under-bred man by the different ways in which they lounge in an armchair. My dear Adeline, what spectacle is more appalling than an under-bred man very much at his ease?

SIR JOHN

My dear Unwin, I always tell you you're too fastidious. What you call good breeding isn't the whole of life. Many men who haven't got it have got what is more valuable; and when this is the case, I forget their lack of the little, and think only of their possession of what is great. Still, I agree with you that, contrary to popular opinion, what we call the best society, even where it is vulgar in many ways, has, as a whole, a remarkable simplicity of manner—and a dignity of manner which you hardly realise except when you find yourself among people who lack it. It is, in

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fact, in social intercourse what a fine style is in literature. And now since you, both of you, are fond of literary discussions, let me tell you of a point connected with literature which often presents itself to my mind.

MISS UNWIN

You think manners, don't you, too frivolous a thing to talk about?

SIR JOHN

Not at all. What I want to say grows out of that very question of manners to which your brother was just now alluding. You know, my dear Miss Adeline, that critics have often debated whether literature flourishes best under a monarchy or under a democracy. In its traditional form this discussion is, perhaps, rather out of date, but under the surface it has still as much meaning as ever. The real point at issue is not whether the patronage of

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a king, like Louis XIV., is good for literature, or the patronage—somewhat different in kind—of what, in the last century, was called ‘the great man’; but whether literature gains most by appealing primarily to the taste of the higher orders of society, or to that of the great mass of the public. The actual patronage of the monarch or the great man was, if we view the matter in this light, merely an accidental means by which the pleasing a limited and fastidious section of society was made a condition of the author’s literary success.

MISS UNWIN

I am certainly not a democrat; but I must confess, all the same, that the dedications to patrons in books of the last century are absurd and degrading; and I am sure we may all be glad that even our humblest and poorest authors need no longer resort to them.

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SIR JOHN

Yes, the patron system had its evils, of course ; but what I want to insist on is, that although it had its evils it had its advantages also. It not only tempted the author—or the poor author, at all events—to please the individual patron by flattering him in a degrading way ; but it kept alive a sense among writers generally that literature must primarily please the fastidious and polite world, and the rest of the public afterwards. The consequence was that writers generally, whatever might be their matter, instinctively tried to express it in a polite and well-bred style. They treated the reader with that instinctive courteous distance with which a well-bred man instinctively treats a stranger. If they laughed, they laughed gently. If they were vehemently in earnest, they never indulged in literary gesticulation, nor gave one the impression of men

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who were rolling their eyes and shouting. They expressed themselves, or endeavoured to express themselves, as though they were speaking in a drawing-room, a library, or a senate house. They argued with the reader as one courtier might argue with another, or as a minister might differ from a king. This attitude of mind on the part of authors generally had an equally general influence upon all literary style.

MISS UNWIN

Do you think the influence was for bad, or for good?

SIR JOHN

Just think for yourself of the way in which the influence showed itself. Think of the *Spectator*. Those essays could no more have been addressed directly to a democracy than a piece of delicate music could be addressed to a

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chance concourse of men, standing together in the noise of some deafening London thoroughfare. Again, take the style of Gibbon. His style has the dignity proper to a man who is speaking primarily to some august conclave, to all of whose members, even to those who are hostile to him, he owes a respect of demeanour if not of mind; and whom he will never insult except through the forms of courtesy.

MISS UNWIN

And you think this kind of manner—
this kind of style—an advantage?

SIR JOHN

To say once again something I said just now, I think a great many men with no breeding at all infinitely better—and in a certain sense better gentlemen—than many others with the best breeding. But if, without taking away

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the sterling merits of the former, you could add to them the good breeding of the latter, it is impossible to deny that you would very much improve them. That is to say, though literature may gain in some ways by appealing directly to the democracy, it tends to lose, by doing so, one of its chief charms, though not, perhaps, one of its chief values—namely, that grace, dignity, polish, ease and reticence of manner which it was obliged to cultivate when it addressed itself primarily to an aristocracy. I always think of this with a sigh when I contrast the mannerless styles of historians like Green and Freeman with the style of Gibbon, or even of Macaulay. When one reads Gibbon one feels one is being addressed by a man who has the manners of an accomplished diplomatist, and the dignity of a statesman whose coat is covered with Orders. When one reads Freeman one feels one

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is being addressed by a man in his shirt sleeves. When one reads Green one feels one is being addressed by a bank-holiday clerk.

MR UNWIN

I need hardly tell you, Sir John, that I agree with every word you say. But I would go farther even than you, for though you think that literature has lost in point of form by appealing directly to the democracy, I fancy you have a sneaking conviction that in point of matter it has improved.

SIR JOHN

The literature of knowledge has undoubtedly become much fuller and more various; and the patronage of the democracy, which is more lucrative than that of the patron, has certainly enlisted in the service of this kind of literature a far larger number of highly educated writers than existed in the last

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century. But if you confine what you say to imaginative literature, I agree with you. If the writers of novels, for instance, had to please the few before they could reach the many, the literature of fiction would gain. Indeed, I will admit that its direct patronage by the many is tending in a most remarkable way to injure, if not to ruin it.

MR UNWIN

I am perfectly certain that were it necessary to please the few first, the most widely popular of our modern novels would either never be published at all, or would, if they were published, be incalculably better than they are.

MISS UNWIN

You don't, then, look on popularity as any test of literary merit?

SIR JOHN

I doubt if any novel is ever widely

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popular without being animated by exceptional merit of some kind. But you may say the same of a popular music-hall song. One of the most important modern additions to the language of political controversy has been contributed by a music-hall song.

‘We don’t want to fight,
But, by Jingo, if we do—’

These are certainly verses which could not have been written by everybody, although, regarded as literature, they are literature of the lowest order. I think I can explain the matter by reference to art of another kind. Do you ever find time, Miss Adeline, during the season, to visit the Royal Academy?

MISS UNWIN

I do; but I very rarely see a

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picture there I should care to have. The people, I think, amuse me far more than the pictures.

SIR JOHN

It was about the people I was going to speak to you. If you watch the crowd narrowly, and listen to the criticisms they are making, you will find that the pictures—other than portraits of the Royal family—which attract most attention, and give real pleasure to the greatest number of spectators, are what all cultivated judges would call works of the lowest art. I stood for a quarter of an hour once in view of two pictures, counting the number of people that gave to each more than a passing attention, and trying to see how each really affected them. One of these pictures was a very fine work of Lord Leighton's. For every one person

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who stood arrested by this, I counted ten clustering round the other; and while those who looked at Lord Leighton's work did so in cold silence, those who looked at the other broke constantly into expressions of delight. 'George — Emily — I say, look at that, now! That is good! Isn't it the very life?' Well—what do you think this latter picture was? It was called 'Baby's Playthings.' Now, Lord Leighton's picture sold for four thousand pounds. 'Baby's Playthings' was, I think, not sold at all; and pictures of the 'Baby's Playthings' order now form a small minority at all our modern exhibitions. The reason is that the painter still has to please the patron before he pleases the public; and the patron, even if he has not much taste himself, is generally rich enough to secure the advice of experts who know what good art is. Were this not the case

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—if the painter, like the novelist, reaped his reward by a direct appeal to the public, and was paid in proportion to the number of people who stood staring at his pictures — the influence of the reward obtained in such a way would reduce the production of good pictures to a minimum; it would stimulate the production of pictures like ‘Baby’s Playthings,’ and would, indeed, be practically fatal to fine art altogether. And the case with regard to imaginative literature, and novels especially, is very much the same.

MISS UNWIN

But when, in London, we were talking about poetry, you seemed to take up a position exactly opposite. You seemed to say that our poets of to-day failed—poets like our friend Mr Beranger—because their appeal was

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made not to the many—the democracy ;
but only to a very few.

MR UNWIN

That was not the way in which I understood Sir John myself. I understood him to mean that these poets failed, not because their first appeal was to the few, but to the wrong kind of few—to a few who have possibly some sound literary taste, but who have nothing else sound in their composition at all.

SIR JOHN

Your brother is right. Let us go back to the case of painting. A great picture, though primarily it may appeal to the few only, or at all events appeal to the many, less than a bad and a vulgar picture, would, nevertheless, please the many in proportion as they

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could be brought to understand it. But the diseased sentiment, the feeble or barren thoughts, and the unmanly dreaming of our contemporary minor poets—and they are all we have—would, in proportion as the many were brought to understand them fully, excite an increasing volume, not of admiration, but contempt. My opinion is that modern literature suffers by having as its direct patron an enormous middle and lower middle class, not because this class would be incapable of enjoying the best, if only the best were given to it, but because, if left to itself, it is so easily satisfied with the worst ; and the worst can be supplied to it in almost unlimited quantities.

MISS UNWIN

You mean that this public, in respect of the literature which it patronises, is like a girl who is ambitious to be dressed

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as well as possible, and would wear with pride and delight the most perfect dresses producible, if only they were chosen for her by her mother, and she were given nothing else ; but who, if left to her own unaided taste, goes simpering, happy and ridiculous, in cheap and tawdry fineries.

SIR JOHN

An admirable woman's illustration.

MISS UNWIN

I think the servants are waiting to have their luncheon, and to pack up the things. What do you say to walking home by the loch ?

SIR JOHN

By all means. I think by this time we have almost exhausted the question, which I began accidentally discussing with your brother in the train ; but

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literature is an inexhaustible subject. At some other time let us attack some other side of it ; and now let us refresh ourselves with the contemplation not of art but of nature.

NOTE

The contents of this volume originally appeared at intervals in the Pall Mall Gazette, and are re-published with the courteous permission of the Proprietor. They represent reflections which have from time to time suggested themselves to one who has regarded literature from a reader's point of view rather than a writer's, and has been accustomed to think of it in connection with interests and problems external to itself, and also of prior importance—problems arising out of the practical movement of affairs and the changing conditions of society and social intercourse.

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